My Lots are in Thy Hands: Sortilege and its Practitioners in Late Antiquity

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My Lots are in Thy Hands: Sortilege and its Practitioners in Late Antiquity

Edited by

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William E. Klingshirn

with the assistance of

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ego autem in te speravi Domine
dixi Deus meus es tu
in manibus tuis sortes meae
eripe me de manu inimicorum meorum
et a persequentibus me

Psalm 30.15–16 VULG.

But I have put my trust in thee, O Lord:
I said, thou art my God.
My lots are in thy hands.
Deliver me out of the hands of my enemies;
and from them that persecute me.

DOUAY VERSION

In manibus tuis sortes meae. Non in manibus hominum, sed in manibus tuis. Quae sunt istae sortes? quare sortes? Audito nomine sortium, non debemus sortilegos quaerere. Sors enim non aliquid mali est; sed res est in dubitatione humana divinam indicans voluntatem.

AUGUSTINE, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 30, enarr. 2, serm. 2.13, CCSL 38: 211

"In your hands are my lots." Not in human hands but in your hands. What are these lots? Why lots? When we hear the word 'lots' we should not look for lot diviners. For a lot is not something evil; rather, it is a thing that indicates God's will in the midst of human doubt.

⁘

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Preface

This volume originated in a two-day symposium on sortilege in late antiquity held at Princeton University in November, 2011. Sponsors of the conference included, at Princeton, The David A. Gardner '69 Magic Project in the Council of the Humanities, the Program in the Ancient World, the Program in Hellenic Studies, and the Department of Religion, and at the Catholic University of America, the Center for the Study of Early Christianity. The editors are grateful to symposium participants and to Lorraine Fuhrmann, Mary Kay Bodnar, and Jeffrey Guest in the Princeton Department of Religion for their help in organizing the conference and making the poster. We especially thank Lance Jenott, lecturer in Religious Studies at Washington University in St. Louis, for his excellent work in editing the volume. Nathan C. Johnson expertly prepared the indices, for which we express our gratitude.

We thank the anonymous peer reviewers for their constructive feedback, the board of the series Religions in the Graeco-Roman World for accepting it, and the editors at Brill Publishers, especially Tessa Schild and Jarno Florusse. It has been a pleasure to collaborate on this volume as editors and we have appreciated each other's expertise and collegiality.

We are also grateful to our families.

AnneMarie would like to thank her husband Jan Willem van der Werff and their children Kees, Erik, Rosemarie and Annabel for their love and support. And also her parents, Ary and Gerie (Geertje) Luijendijk-Hordijk, who met through an act of lot divination. On her birthday, Geertje, an elementary school teacher in Rotterdam, was invited by four students to their homes. In order to choose whose house she would visit, Geertje took four matches, broke one of them and then put them in her hand, leaving only the tops visible. Jeanne Luijendijk drew the short match. At her house, Geertje met Jeanne's older brother Ary. It was love at first sight.

William thanks his wife Patricia and their (as it turned out, far more empirically-minded) sons for indulging his interest in divination over the years, and in particular for wide-ranging dinnertime conversations about the subject. When both boys confirmed after completing elementary school that they had been required to use the term "random number generating cubes" for the instruments they used to study probability – "because dice are for gambling" – they already knew from our discussions that dice had historically been used for far more profound and transgressive purposes. Divination is all about lived experience: it is important never to lose sight of that.

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Abbreviations

ÄA	Ägyptologische Abhandlungen
ÄAT	Ägypten und Altes Testament
AB	Anchor Bible
ADAI.Ä	Abhandlungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo, Ägyptologische Reihe
Aeg	*Aegyptus*
AHDL	*Archives d'histoire doctrinale et littéraire du moyen age*
AJP	*American Journal of Philology*
AJSL	*American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures*
APAW.PH	Abhandlungen der (K.) Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse
APF	*Archiv für Papyrusforschung*
ArTS	University of Pennsylvania Armenian Texts and Studies
BASP	*Bulletin of the American Society of Papyrologists*
BETL	Bibliotheca Ephemeridum Theologicarum Lovaniensium
BIFAO	*Bulletin de l'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale*
BMCR	*Bryn Mawr Classical Review*
BSGRT	Bibliotheca scriptorum Graecorum et Romanorum Teubneriana
ByzZ	*Byzantinische Zeitschrift*
CBET	Contributions to Biblical Exegesis and Theology
CCSG	Corpus Christianorum: Series Graeca
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum: Series Latina
CEg	*Chronique d'Égypte*
CEJL	Commentaries on Early Jewish Literature
CIG	*Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum*. Edited by August Boeckh. 4 vols. Berlin, 1828–1877
CIL	*Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*. Berlin, 1862–
CP	*Classical Philology*
CPG	*Corpus Palmomanticum Graecum* (= *Papyrologica Florentina* 39). Edited by Salvatore Costanza (Florence: Gonnelli, 2009)
DJD	Discoveries in the Judean Desert
D-K	H. Diels and W. Kranz, *Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*
DOP	*Dumbarton Oaks Papers*
ETL	*Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses*
FThSt	Freiburger Theologische Studien
Hist. mon.	*Historia monachorum in Aegypto*
HSCP	*Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*

HSS	Harvard Semitic Studies
HTR	*Harvard Theological Review*
HWDA	*Handwörterbuch des deutschen Aberglaubens*
ICC	International Critical Commentary
ICS	*Illinois Classical Studies*
JANER	*Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Religions*
JBL	*Journal of Biblical Literature*
JCoptS	*Journal of Coptic Studies*
JECS	*Journal of Early Christian Studies*
JEA	*Journal of Egyptian Archeology*
JJP	*Journal of Juristic Papyrology*
JJS	*Journal of Jewish Studies*
JRA	*Journal of Roman Archaeology*
JRS	*Journal of Roman Studies*
JSHRZ	Jüdische Schriften aus hellenistisch-römischer Zeit
JSJS	Supplements to the Journal for the Study of Judaism
JSQ	*Jewish Studies Quarterly*
JTS	*Journal of Theological Studies*
KNT	Kommentar zum Neuen Testament
LBG	Lexikon zur byzantinischen Gräzität
LCL	Loeb Classical Library
LDAB	Leuven Database of Ancient Books
LSJ	Liddell, Henry George, Robert Scott, Henry Stuart Jones. *A Greek-English Lexicon.* 9th ed. with revised supplement. Oxford: Clarendon, 1996
MBPF	Münchener Beiträge zur Papyrusforschung und antiken Rechtsgeschichte
MGH	Monumenta Germaniae historica
MGJV	*Mitteilungen der Gesellschaft für Jüdische Volkskunde*
MRSt(*L*)	*Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* (*London*)
Mus	*Le Muséon*
NTS	*New Testament Studies*
NovT	*Novum Testamentum*
OCP	*Orientalia Christiana Periodica*
OLA	Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta
ORA	Orientalische Religionen in der Antike
Pack^2	Pack, Roger A. *The Greek and Latin Literary Texts from Greco-Roman Egypt*. Second, revised edition. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1965
PDM	*Papryi Demoticae Magicae*
PG	*Patrologia graeca* (= *Patrologiae cursus completus: Series graeca*). Edited by J.-P. Migne. 162 vols. Paris, 1857–1886

PGM	*Papyri Graecae Magicae: Die griechischen Zauberpapyri*. Edited by Karl Preisendanz. 2nd ed. Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973–1974
PSI	*Papiri greci e latini* (*Pubblicazioni della Società Italiana per la ricerca dei papiri greci e latini in Egitto*). Florence.
PW	*Paulys Real-Encyclopadie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft*. New edition by Georg Wissowa and Wilhelm Kroll. 50 vols. in 84 parts. Stuttgart: Metzler and Druckenmüller, 1894–1980
RAC	*Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum.* Edited by Theodor Klauser et al. Stuttgart: Hiersemann, 1950–
RCSF	*Rivista critica di storia della filosofia*
REAug	*Revue des études augustiniennes*
REByz	*Revue des études byzantines*
RevPhil	*Revue de philologie*
RGG^4	*Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*. Edited by Hans Dieter Betz. 4th edition. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998–2007
RGRW	Religions in the Graeco-Roman World
RHDF	*Revue historique de droit français et étranger*
RHR	*Revue de l'histoire des religions*
RLC	*Revue de Littérature Comparée*
GRBS	*Greek, Roman, and Byzantine Studies*
SAOC	Studies in Ancient Oriental Civilizations
SBLTT	Society of Biblical Literature Texts and Translations
SC	Sources chrétiennes
SÖAW.PH	Sitzungsberichte. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-historische Klasse
SR	*Studies in Religion*
STAC	Studies and Texts in Antiquity and Christianity / Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum
TENTS	Texts and Editions for New Testament Study
ThesCRA	*Thesaurus Cultus et Rituum Antiquorum*. 8 vols. and index. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2004–14.
TLG	Thesaurus Linguae Graecae
TS	Texts and Studies
TSAJ	Texte und Studien zum antiken Judentum
TUAT	Texte aus der Umwelt des Alten Testaments
TUGAL	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur
VC	*Vigiliae Christianae*
YCS	Yale Classical Studies
ZAC	*Zeitschrift für antikes Christentum*
ZÄS	*Zeitschrift für ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde*

ZDMG	*Zeitschrift der Deutschen morgenländischen Gesellschaft*
ZNW	*Zeitschrift für die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche*
ZPE	*Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik*
ZRG	*Zeitschrift für Rechtsgeschichte*

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Introduction

1 Defining Lot Divination[1]

Divination by lot, also known as cleromancy and sortilege (formed, respectively, from the word 'lot' in Greek and Latin) was arguably the simplest, cheapest, and most widespread form of divination in antiquity, and remains so to this day. Evan M. Zuesse described it as "making mechanical manipulations with small objects such as dice, drawing long or short stalks from a bundle, and so on."[2] Auguste Bouché-Leclercq applied the same theological rationale to it that he used to explain divination performed by inanimate objects or the utterance of chance words: "These seek to leave to Providence, envisioned as open-ended chance (*hasard*), free play and an unobstructed path in what is unforeseen."[3]

1.1 *The Logic of Lot Divination*

Lot divination took innumerable forms in the ancient Near East and Mediterranean world – many discussed in this volume – but what groups all of these into a single category is that their mechanisms of selection, whether dice, knucklebones, pebbles, beans, branches, or almost any other kind of object, must display – that is, be perceived to have – an *equal likelihood* (prior to divine intervention) of producing one result or another.[4] In a game, this assures participants of a fair result; in the division of land it assures them of an equitable result; in lot divination it assures them of a true result. Truth is what is at stake in every divinatory inquiry, and in lot divination it is attained by the unambiguous selection or manifestation of one signifier over another. The signifier, or lot, is usually discrete rather than continuous (yes or no, white or black, 3–1–1 or 1–1–5) and chosen, in a single or multiple event, from a field that

1 This Introduction has four parts. William Klingshirn was mainly responsible for parts 1 and 2 and AnneMarie Luijendijk for parts 3 and 4. We are jointly responsible for the whole.

2 "Divination," *Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. Mircea Eliade, vol. 4 (New York, 1987), 375. Zuesse drew his definition from H. J. Rose, "Divination, Introductory and Primitive," *Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics*, vol. 4 (New York and Edinburgh, 1912), 779.

3 "Elles cherchent à laisser à la Providence, entrevue sous la forme indécise du hasard, un libre jeu et une carrière ouverte dans l'imprévu," *Histoire de la divination dans l'Antiquité*, vol. 1 (Paris, 1879), 189.

4 Deborah J. Bennett, *Randomness* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998) offers an accessible introduction to the history of the subjects discussed in this paragraph. For a variety of ways of understanding the notion of a divinatory logic, see David Zeitlyn, "Divinatory Logics: Diagnoses and Predictions Mediating Outcomes," *Current Anthropology* 53.5 (2012): 525–46.

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has been constructed to contain all possible answers. The creation of a system in which the divine will can manifest itself thus requires both a perceived randomness (to ensure freedom) and a definite outcome (to ensure truth). The so-called "randomizing device" – a term invented in the mid-twentieth century to describe machines for creating or charts for depicting sequences of random (or more accurately pseudo-random) numbers for mathematical, scientific, or statistical purposes[5] – was not in ancient lot divination, as in its modern uses, a device for *generating* randomness, but on the contrary, a vehicle for producing a definite outcome against every *appearance* of randomness.

Understood in this way, the relationship between lot divination and the seemingly random world it seeks to interpret is crucial. Andras Zempléni has suggested that "the divinatory procedure … works by establishing an obvious analogical link between its subject-matters, namely contingent or aleatory events or facts, and its means, namely randomizing devices. What we call chance or randomness is in the same time the object and the means of mechanical divination."[6] That this observation makes sense of the ancient evidence can be seen in the definition of divination that Quintus gives at the beginning of Cicero's dialogue *De divinatione* (1.9): "the prediction and prior perception of those things that are thought to be by chance" (*quae est earum rerum quae fortuitae putantur praedictio atque praesensio*). If the world appeared random, but was in reality providentially determined in every important aspect, then the *lots in God's hands*, in the Psalm verse that serves as the title of this book (further discussed in section 3 below), should be considered as little random as the world itself. Whatever form they took, lots were then simply a small sample of reality itself, organized in such a way as to be grasped, worked, and interpreted by human ritual action.

1.2 *The Practice of Lot Divination*

Lot divination in the ancient Mediterranean and near Eastern world was already very old by the time Cicero wrote his *De divinatione* in the mid-first

5 See, for instance, an early use in the review article by W. G. Cochran, "Recent Mathematical Tables," *Mathematical Tables and Other Aids to Computation* 1.8 (Oct. 1944): 312–23, at 319: "In the layout of replicated experiments and in the process of taking samples, there is often occasion to use some randomizing device, such as a set of numbered beans. More convenient for many purposes is a set of random digits, of which 15,000 are given in Table XXXIII."

6 Andras Zempléni, "How to Say Things with Assertive Acts? About Some Pragmatic Properties of Senoufa Divination," in *Beyond Textuality: Asceticism and Violence in Anthropological Interpretation*, ed. Gilles Bibeau and Ellen Corin (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), 233–47, at 236.

century BCE.[7] With the accelerating exchange of ideas and practices that accompanied the growth of the Roman empire over the succeeding centuries, there developed, alongside influential and persistent local, regional, and national forms, an imperial *koine* of cleromantic practice, with networks of shrines, professional lot diviners, and written systems for the operation of sortilege. This is the cultural situation we find in late antiquity, but one increasingly complicated by an intensification of controversy, both philosophical and religious, over the theory and practice of divination. The flowering of divination and polemic that resulted makes the subject of lot divination between the third and eighth centuries CE especially interesting and possible to study. This is the case for at least two reasons, first, because disagreement – both between schools of thought and within them – tends to leave a more abundant record than agreement, and second, because the parties to the controversy, in part because of the standing of prophecy among Jews and Christians, accorded a higher level of importance to the truth-bearing and faith-affirming powers of divination than appears to have been the case in the earlier empire. Although the title of this volume is drawn from the Greek translation of a Hebrew psalm, its faith in divine providence would not have been limited to Jewish or Christian tradition.

In the classical taxonomy of divination, lot divination was classified in the category of 'artificial' or 'technical' divination, since it depended not on direct revelation, as in the case of prophecy and dreams, but on the observation and interpretation of signs, such as stars, lightning, or the entrails of sacrificed animals (Cic. *Div*. 1.12). Lot divination differed from other forms of sortition, such as that used to allocate public offices,[8] assign duties to magistrates,[9] or apportion land,[10] not so much in its ritual procedures or religious legitimation, but in its open-ended content, focus on occult knowledge, and applicability to a wide range of problems.[11] Its flexibility was virtually limitless, and it could be especially powerful when combined with other forms of divination, for

7 André Caquot and Marcel Leibovici, eds., *La divination*, vol. 1 (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1968).

8 The Athenian use of lots for this purpose is explained by R. K. Sinclair, *Democracy and Participation in Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 17–18.

9 Roberta Stewart, *Public Office in Early Rome: Ritual Procedure and Political Practice* (University of Michigan Press, 1998), 12–51.

10 Brian Campbell, "Sharing out land: two passages in the *Corpus Agrimensorum Romanorum*," *CLQ* 45.2 (1995), 540–46.

11 See in general the papers collected in *Sorteggio pubblico e cleromanzia dall'antichità all'età moderna: atti della tavola rotonda, Università degli studi di Milano, Dipartimento di scienze dell'antichità, 26–27 gennaio 2000*, ed. Federica Cordano and Cristiano Grottanelli (Milan: Edizioni Et, 2001).

example, in collections of divinely inspired oracles. It was also easily adapted to differing theological or philosophical conceptions, and could be justified in any religious framework in which divine providence played a part, however strong or weak.

We should suppose from comparative evidence that lot diviners – *sortilegi* in Latin (there is no exact counterpart to the *sortilegus* in Greek, though χρησμολόγος comes close) – were considered essential for the efficacy of the various forms of lot divination, but this is still something of an open question.[12] There is little doubt that freelance lot diviners could be found across the empire,[13] but lot divination was also regularly available at shrines, for instance in Egypt (Frankfurter, this volume). Christian leaders such as Augustine, while cautiously endorsing some forms of lot divination, unambiguously rejected *sortilegi*. It is possible that such attitudes encouraged, or at least did not discourage, the entry of Christian clergy and religious into the field, where they would have operated not independently, but out of the churches, shrines, and monasteries in which they were based.

1.3 *Writing*

It may appear from the scholarship presented in this volume that lot divination in late antiquity was overwhelmingly textual in its operation. Certainly, the types we know most about involved writing – that is how we know about them – but we should be cautious about generalizing from accidents of survival. It is highly likely that lot diviners learned their craft not from written manuals, but from oral instruction committed to memory. The consultations they conducted, moreover, would have left behind few material traces. It is true that instruments were used (Klingshirn, this volume), but these would have been in most cases exceedingly common, and not easily identifiable as divinatory, especially if they had other uses, such as the knucklebones and dice used in games and gambling.

Nor does the use of writing always help in the identification. A case in point is the so-called 'divination kit' discovered at Pergamum in the late nineteenth century and now housed in Berlin.[14] Consisting of a bronze disk, rectangular plate, triangular base, nail, rings, and polished stones – all inscribed with

12 W. E. Klingshirn, "Inventing the *sortilegus*: lot divination and cultural identity in Italy, Rome, and the provinces," in *Religion in Republican Italy*, ed. Celia E. Schultz and Paul B. Harvey, YCS 33 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 137–61.

13 Heidi Wendt, *At the Temple Gates: The Religion of Freelance Experts in the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

14 Attilio Mastrocinque, "The Divinatory Kit from Pergamon and Greek Magic in Late Antiquity," *JRA* 15 (2002): 173–87.

magical symbols and letters – this group of objects was supposed by Richard Wünsch to be related to the apparatus described by Ammianus Marcellinus in a disastrous case of lot divination gone wrong (Amm. Marc. 29.1).[15] Richard Gordon, however, has recently questioned whether these objects, or a similar group excavated in Apamea, Syria, were ever used in combination with each other or for divination at all.[16] They may have been used in magical procedures that had little to do with divination. Part of the mystery, of course, results from the necessity of disguising the purpose of magical or divinatory objects. The diviners whose trial Ammianus so vividly describes were forced to confess not so much by the merciless torture to which they were subjected, as by the discovery of the divinatory instrument they had used. Writing in their case was equally dangerous, since the verses generated by their divinatory technique had apparently been written down and were available to be read out at the trial (Amm. Marc. 29.1.33).

Of course most divinatory consultations (even the most dangerous kind, involving astrology[17]) did not end up as the subject of treason trials. Diviners in late antiquity could, if their method called for it, make use of writing with relative safety. Apart from its practical advantages (portability, ease of use, storage capacity, and impressive appearance), what writing offered most importantly was authoritative access to truth. The fundamental reason for this, as Mary Beard has observed, was that "for literate and illiterate alike, pagan communications with the divine could be seen as embedded in, or formed by, written texts."[18] It is for this reason that the surviving texts of lot divination itself – questions, responses, and prayers – are exceedingly precious. These stand at the very center of the divinatory communication between divine and human, and embody its messages. At the same time, they resist easy comprehension. Although they appear to be forms of ordinary language, they most emphatically are not, and must be treated with extreme care. They are in fact a special case of divinatory speech, a genre that raises multiple problems

15 Richard Wünsch, *Antikes Zaubergerät aus Pergamon*, Jahrbuch des kaiserlich deutschen archäologischen Instituts, Ergänzungsheft 6 (Berlin: Georg Reimer, 1905).

16 Richard Gordon, "Another View of the Pergamon Divination Kit," *JRA* 15 (2002): 188–98.

17 For the known cases from the high empire, see Frederick H. Cramer, *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics* (Philadelphia, 1954), 251–81.

18 Mary Beard, "Writing and Religions: *Ancient Literacy* and the Function of the Written Word in Roman Religion," in *Literacy in the Roman World*, ed. Mary Beard (Ann Arbor, MI: Journal of Roman Archaeology, 1991), 35–58, at 53.

of meaning, intention, and truth, as recent debates in the philosophical and anthropological literature have demonstrated.[19]

1.4 *Rationale for This Volume*

Since the late nineteenth century, scholarship on lots (further discussed in section 2 below) has mostly focused on identifying and editing the written texts used for its operation, both texts previously unknown and those that were known, but not correctly identified. This volume attempts to summarize and standardize what we know of such texts (in chapter one below), while advancing new questions about their use and significance.

While none of the chapters in this volume focuses exclusively on such issues, many touch on the specific problems that written texts pose for our understanding of the operation and experience of lot divination in late antiquity. What relationship existed between the lots written in the margins of Gospel manuscripts and the scriptures themselves (Wilkinson, Childers), or between Homeric verses used for divination and their poetic contexts (Meerson)? How were the Jewish and Christian scriptures themselves used for divination (Van der Horst)? How adaptable as living texts were written lot collections like the Sortes Astrampsychi (Stewart)? What challenges to our classification of lots are presented by papyri that may have been associated with saints' shrines in Egypt (Kocar)? And how did written lots function when they were matched up with 'embodied' methods of selection such as divination by muscular twitches (Costanza)? Such questions are particularly important in light of the interrelatedness of the lot collections that circulated in late antiquity. Those posed for one set of texts can easily apply to (and perhaps be answered by) another set altogether. The inventory offered in chapter one is intended not only to assist readers in navigating the references they encounter in this volume, but also to serve as a starting point for investigating other cleromantic texts, whether already known or remaining to be discovered or identified.

The uses of lots, whether written or unwritten, prompt other questions in this volume. What functionalist explanations can be considered? Did lots work to disseminate market information (Ratzan) or justify legal judgments (Naether)? And how did the use of lots align with religious faith? Did lots bind

19 Pascal Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication: A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Martin Holbraad, *Truth in Motion: The Recursive Anthropology of Cuban Divination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

believers to fate or free them from anxiety (Nasrallah)? Could they even have been forms of prayer, where trust in God should prevail over doubt (Luijendijk)?

2 History of Scholarship

In seeking answers to these and other questions, the contributors to this volume join a long tradition of scholarship on lot divination. This tradition can be divided into two broadly different, though not neatly separate phases: first, from antiquity through the early modern period, when lots were studied for their practical applications, their value as vehicles for philosophical reflection on Fate and Fortune, and the cultural, theological, and legal limits that should govern their use; and second, from the early modern period to the present when they were increasingly, though not exclusively, seen as artefacts of a pre-scientific, "primitive," or "superstitious" world view, to be studied more for what they revealed about the past or the anthropological Other than as active mechanisms for revealing the divine will.

Ancient and late ancient discussions of lots were dominated by the philosophical and theological problems that they posed, for instance, whether or how they could be genuine vehicles for conveying divine truth, how they differed from the outcomes of chance, or what kind of knowledge it was that they communicated. Cicero, Origen, Iamblichus, and Augustine offer some of the key texts. By the early middle ages, such questions were no longer being asked. What we find instead are descriptions of lots that are only as detailed as a credible narrative or accurate condemnation required. The *Histories* of Gregory of Tours (late sixth century) and the anonymous *Homilia de sacrilegiis* (late eighth century) offer good examples. Eventually, however, a more interesting set of questions – practical, legal, and ethical, as well as theological and philosophical – began to emerge.

In the field of canon law, the most far-reaching treatment of lot divination occurs in Gratian's *Decretum* C. 26 (first half of the twelfth century), which presents the story of a priest determined by his bishop to be a *sortilegus* and *divinus*.[20] Although excommunicated, the priest was absolved on his deathbed by another priest and prescribed penance without his bishop's knowledge. Before examining the technical questions of excommunication and penance

20 *Corpus Iuris Canonici*, ed. E. Friedberg, vol. 1 (Leipzig, 1879), cols. 1019–1046, at 1019–1020. A good introduction to the subject can be found in John Gilchrist, "Canon Law," in *Medieval Latin: An Introduction and Bibliographical Guide*, ed. F. A. C. Mantello and A. G. Rigg, 241–53 (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 1996).

raised in the case (qq. 6–7), the *Decretum* considers five broader questions about lot divination on the basis of a wide range of biblical and patristic authorities: what are *sortilegi*? (q. 1); is it a sin to be a *sortilegus*? (q. 2); what are the origins of divination? (q. 3); how many types of divination are there? (q. 4); and do *sortilegi* and *divini* deserve to be excommunicated? (q. 5).

The influence of this and related texts (and commentaries) in medieval and early modern Europe was matched in scholastic theology by Thomas Aquinas's treatment of lots. His *Liber de Sortibus*, addressed to Jacob of Tonengo, formerly chaplain of Pope Urban IV, in 1270 or 1271, considers whether lots may be used in the selection of a bishop.[21] Its classification of lots into those used for 1) division, 2) consultation, and 3) divination, widely disseminated in an abbreviated form in *Summa Theologiae* (IIa IIae Q95) provided, along with the growing body of legal commentary, a framework for investigating lot divination that persisted well into the eighteenth century.

An early printed example of the combined influence of legal and scholastic authorities on the discussion of lots can be seen in the *Tractatus de Sortibus* of Troilo Malvezzi (1432–1495).[22] Dedicated to Antongaleazzo Bentivoglio (1472–1525),[23] protonotary apostolic and archdeacon of Bologna, it considered the propriety of lots under three categories: those used for predicting the future, those used in games of chance, and those used to indicate the divine will in cases of doubt. Only lots in the second and third categories were considered permissible, and even then in limited cases, for instance, in some kinds of gambling, and to select candidates for secular (not ecclesiastical) office. The treatise was circulated both in its original form – Giovanni Pico della Mirandola acknowledged receiving a copy in 1492[24] – and with slight alterations in Francesco Ziletti's *Tractatus Universi Iuris* (1585).[25]

An impressive compilation of late medieval learning, Malvezzi's work at the same time anticipates the strong continuing interest in lot divination

21 Edited by H. F. Dondaine in the Leonine edition of Thomas Aquinas, *Opera Omnia*, vol. 43 (Rome, 1976), 203–41. Commentary by Alberto Alonso Guardo, "Apuntes sobre el De Sortibus de Tomás de Aquino," in *Dialogues Among Books in Medieval Western Magic and Divination*, ed. S. Rapisarda and E. Niblaeus (Florence: Edizioni del Galluzzo, 2014), 127–45.

22 Troilus Malvetius, *De Sortibus* (Bologna: ca. 1490), digitized by the Bavarian State Library and available at http://daten.digitale-sammlungen.de/~db/0006/bsb00068001/images/index.html?seite=00001&l=de. On the author, see Giorgio Tamba, "Troilo Malvezzi," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 68 (2007): 329–31.

23 Ingeborg Walter, "Antongaleazzo Bentivoglio," *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* 8 (1966): 600–2.

24 *Opera Omnia Ioannis Pici Mirandulae Concordiaeque Comitis*, vol. 1 (Basel, 1557), 366.

25 *Tractatus Universi Iuris* 11.2 (Venice 1585), 398r–402r.

evident between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. This is demonstrated in chapters on lots in the major treatments of divination and oracles,[26] in dissertations and treatises separately devoted to lots,[27] in parodies such as the *Losbuch* of Georg Wickram (Straßburg, 1539),[28] and perhaps most memorably in *Le Tiers Livre* of François Rabelais (Paris, 1546), whose almost impossibly complicated plot centers on the use of divination, beginning with the Homeric and Virgilian lots, to make a marriage decision.[29] Whether Protestant or Catholic, writers and thinkers in the early modern centuries struggled to draw the line between permissible and impermissible uses of lots. At one extreme were the divinatory and demonic devices universally agreed to be wrong, at the other were innocent and amusing games, and in between were the cases of decision-making by lot that required well-informed judgment.[30]

Among English authors, the Puritan minister Thomas Gataker (1574–1654) is notable for an extended and controversial exploration of the distinction between ordinary (natural) and extraordinary (divinatory) lots.[31] By emphasizing their ordinary qualities, he loosened religious restrictions on

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26 *Ioannis Francisci Pici Mirandulae domini et Concordiae comitis De rerum praenotione libri novem* (Strasbourg, 1506–1507), book 6, ch. 6; Caspar Peucer, *Commentarius de praecipuis divinationum generibus* (Wittenberg, 1553), 163r–183r; Girolamo Zanchi, *De Divinatione … Tractatus* (Hanover, 1610), 80–97; and Jules-César Boulenger, *Opusculorum Systema*, vol. 1 (Lyon 1621), 299–304.

27 Johannes Schwede, "Dissertatio academica de sortibus," praeside Andrea Norcopense (Uppsala 1681); Andreas Scheidlin, "De Sanctorum sive apostolorum sortibus ex inspectione s. bibliorum," praeside Heinrich Linck (Altdorf, 1686); Karl Heinrich Gerken, "Disputatio antifanatica de Sortibus biblicis," praeside Johann Deutschmann (Wittenberg, 1698); Jacob Monthelius, "Dissertatio philosophica de sortilegiis," praeside Johan Eenberg (Uppsala, 1705); Georg Christoph Eichler, "Dissertatio inauguralis de sortibus poeticis," praeside Christian Gottlieb Schwarz (Altdorf, 1712); Paul S. Bonge, "De Sortibus Veterum," praeside Heinric Benzel (Lund, 1733); Wilhelm Christian Justus Chrysander, "Oratio de Sortibus" (Halle, 1740); Johann Friedrich Geismeier et al., "Dissertatio historico-theologica de Sortibus Sanctorum," praeside Johann Friedrich Cotta (Tübingen, 1758); Carl Friedrich Bahrdt, "De sortibus epistola" (Leipzig, 1762).

28 *Georg Wickram: Sämtliche Werke*, edited by Hans-Gert Roloff, vol. 9 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2003), 183–84.

29 Edwin M. Duval, *The Design of Rabelais's Tiers Livre de Pantagruel* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1997); Jean Céard, *La nature et les prodiges: l'insolite au XVIe siècle, en France* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1977), esp. 106–58.

30 Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic: Studies in Popular Beliefs in Sixteenth- and Seventeenth-Century England* (London, 1971), 138–46.

31 *Of the Nature and Use of Lots: A Treatise Historicall and Theologicall* (London 1619; second edition 1627). See now Diane Willen, "The Case of Thomas Gataker: Confronting Superstition in Seventeenth-Century England," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 43.3 (2012): 727–49.

lots in the former category, and could thus propose both a qualified approval of gambling and a definition of chance events that suggests "a very elementary theory of probability."[32] In succeeding decades, lots deemed 'extraordinary' or 'divinatory' were also subject to redefinition. In a work originally published in 1683 and revised in 1700, the Haarlem physician Antonie Van Dale made a sustained case for the view, intermittently suggested by earlier authors, that the oracles of antiquity, including those obtained by lot, were frauds perpetrated by ancient priests.[33] Bernard de Fontenelle's adaptation of Van Dale into French in 1686 gave Van Dale's ideas a greater prominence, and prompted a critical reaction by the Jesuit Jean-François Baltus in the early eighteenth century.[34] The resulting controversy played a formative role in the Enlightenment treatment of divination,[35] including lot divination,[36] and as Ossa-Richardson points out, left the way clear in the nineteenth century for the historical approach employed by Auguste Bouché-Leclercq in his four volume *Histoire de la divination* (Paris, 1879–1882).[37] Bouché-Leclercq himself acknowledged this legacy in the bibliographies he appended to many of his chapters, including his chapter on Greek lot divination.[38] Indeed, it is clear that his work could not have been written as it was without access to the scholarship of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Bouché-Leclercq also took note of the research of his own day. In his chapter on Greek lot divination he twice cited Georg Kaibel's seminal paper on the lots of Asia Minor (Sortes Alearum), which correctly identified the genre of these inscriptions.[39] In his chapter on dream divination, he cited Rudolf Hercher's

32 D. R. Bellinghouse, "Probability in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries: An analysis of Puritan Casuistry," *International Statistical Review* 56.1 (1988), 63–74 at 72.

33 A full account can be found in Anthony Ossa-Richardson, *The Devil's Tabernacle: The Pagan Oracles in Early Modern Thought* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 136–201.

34 Bernard de Fontenelle, *Histoire des Oracles* (Paris, 1686), ed. Louis Maigron (1908; repr. Paris: Librairie E. Droz, 1934); Jean-François Baltus, *Réponse à l'Histoire des oracles de M. de Fontenelle* (Strasbourg: Jean-Renaud Doulssecker, 1707); *Suite de la Réponse à l'histoire des oracles, dans laquelle on réfute les objections insérées dans le XIII tome de la Bibliothèque choisie* (Strasbourg, 1708).

35 Ossa-Richardson, *Devil's Tabernacle*, 205–46.

36 William E. Klingshirn, "Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*: Gibbon, Du Cange, and Early Christian Lot Divination," *JECS* 10 (2002): 77–130, at 80–82.

37 Ossa-Richardson, *Devil's Tabernacle*, 268–69.

38 *Histoire de la divination*, vol. 1 (1879), 189–97.

39 *Histoire de la divination*, vol. 1 (1879), pp. 189, 196: Georg Kaibel, "Ein Würfelorakel," *Hermes* 10.2 (1876): 193–202.

edition of the Sortes Astrampsychi.[40] And in his survey of Latin lot divination, he cited Theodor Mommsen's edition of seventeen *sortes* from Padua.[41] But apart from referring to these publications, Bouché-Leclercq did not make much use of them,[42] and it fell to later scholars to draw connections among the increasing number of texts being discovered and published. In 1901, in an effort to specify the genre to which a distinctive group of annotations in the Codex Bezae belonged, James Rendel Harris republished virtually all the texts of lot divination known at the time from manuscripts or inscriptions.[43] Two years later, Johannes Bolte surveyed the manuscript history of lot-books as an appendix to his study of Georg Wickram's *Losbuch*.[44] It was only later that papyrological evidence for this corpus was taken in account, notably by Gudmund Björck at Uppsala in 1939.[45]

As new texts for lot divination were being discovered, published, and surveyed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the practices of lot divination also drew increased attention. This took two main forms in the early to mid twentieth century. One was to gather examples of lot divination from elsewhere than Greece and Rome, and the other was to distinguish the varieties of ancient lot divination from one another.

The first of these research efforts got an early start from James Frazer. In his commentary on Pausanias's description of the oracle of Herakles at Boura (7.25.10), Frazer observed that "[d]ivination by throwing dice, bones, sticks, pebbles, etc., is practised by many barbarous and savage peoples." He cited examples from southeast Asia, Africa, and New Zealand to make the point.[46] Over the succeeding decades a growing body of ethnological fieldwork steadily added to the comparative evidence that could be brought to bear on ancient Mediterranean divination in general and lot divination in particular.[47]

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40 *Histoire de la divination*, vol. 1 (1879), p. 278: R. Hercher (ed.), *Astrampsychi Oraculorum Decades CIII* (Berlin, 1863).

41 *Histoire de la divination*, vol. 4 (1882), p. 155: *CIL* I (1863), pp. 267–70.

42 As Johannes Nollé points out, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel: Astragal – und Alphabetchresmologien der hochkaiserzeitlichen Orakelrenaissance* (Munich, 2007), 1.

43 The *Annotators of the Codex Bezae* (London, 1901), 113–84.

44 Johannes Bolte, ed., *Georg Wickrams Werke*, vol. 4 (Tübingen, 1903), 276–348. On Wickram's work, see above, p. 11.

45 Gudmund Björck, "Heidnische und christliche Orakel mit fertigen Antworten," *Symbolae Osloenses* 19 (1939): 86–98.

46 *Pausanias's Description of Greece*, trans. and comm. J. G. Frazer, vol. 4 (London, 1898), 174.

47 For an indication of its scope, see the evidence collected by Caquot and Leibovici, *Divination*.

The second line of inquiry, not completely distinct from the first, can be best seen in encyclopedia articles on lot divination such as those by Victor Ehrenberg (1927)[48] and Fritz Boehm (1932/33).[49] In English, Arthur Stanley Pease's commentary on Cicero's *De divinatione* (1920–23) demonstrates the same aims.[50] The result of both scholarly initiatives was by mid-century a well-marked field in which advances continued to be made in the understanding of texts and their relationships to one another. In this volume, what is now known about the literature of lot divination is surveyed in chapter one. We have not done the same for scholarship on the practices and meanings of lot divination, whose comparative, theoretical, and historical dimensions are too complex to classify or summarize. Rather than try to do so, we offer the volume itself as a step along the way, a path of discovery whose ending point cannot be known or even guessed at – the same predicament, in fact, that ancient users of divination faced.

3 Title and Organization of the Volume

The practice of consulting lots in late antiquity was deeply interwoven with religious, ritual practices. Belief in the truth conveyed by lots was based on the conviction that they came from the gods or God. The title of our volume is based on Ps 30 (31): 15–16. Translating the original Hebrew text of the psalm, modern versions render this verse as: "My times are in your hand (KJV, RSV, NRSV)" or "hands (NAB)," or "My days are in your hand" (JB). But in antiquity, readers of numerous Greek and Latin manuscripts knew a slightly different reading: "My Lots are in Thy hands" (Douay Version), or in more contemporary English, "My fortunes are in your hand" (REB). From a text-critical point of view, a Greek scribe may have mistaken the word ΚΑΙΡΟΙ ("times") for the very similar looking word ΚΛΗΡΟΙ ("lots"). Also at other instances in the Septuagint or Old Greek translation we find the same confusion between these words.[51]

48 Victor Ehrenberg, "Losung," *PW* 13,2 (Stuttgart, 1927), cols. 1451–1504.

49 Fritz Boehm, "Los, losen," *HWDA*, vol. 5 (Berlin-Leipzig, 1932–33), cols. 1351–1401.

50 *M. Tulli Ciceronis de divinatione*, ed. Arthur Stanley Pease, *University of Illinois Studies in Language and Literature* 6 (1920): 161–500; 8 (1923): 153–474.

51 The editors of the Göttingen Septuagint note several other places where καιρός is transmitted with another word. In Ps 4:8 καιρός becomes καρπός; and in Num 16:14, where κλῆρον is read as κλήρους in some mss, and καιρός in others (and Latin codices 91 92 94–96 read here *in sortem*).

Major Greek bible manuscripts such as the Codex Vaticanus and the Codex Sinaiticus[52] read Psalm 30 with "lots" (κλῆροι) instead of "times" (καιροί). This was also the reading the famous third-century exegete Origen of Alexandria[53] and many other Christian authors writing in Greek encountered in their Psalters.[54] One Greek church father, Theodoret, knew both readings: "my lots are in your hands" and "my times are in your hands."[55]

"My lots are in your hands" (*in manibus tuis sortes meae*) is also the text of certain Latin translations. Bishop Augustine of Hippo read this in his Latin version, as we know from his *Enarrationes in Psalmos*: "'In your hands are my lots.' Not in human hands but in your hands." Jerome's Vulgate text preserves this version in his translation of the psalms according to the Septuagint, but in his translation according to the Hebrews, changes it to "my times are in your hand" (*in manu tua tempora mea*).

Through private scripture study and public liturgy, Christians in late antiquity would be familiar with this particular rendition of these verses in the Psalter. While scribes of the Psalter knew their lots to be in God's hand, in the concrete practice of sortilege, the actual dice were in the hands of the querent.

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52 Codex Sinaiticus, fol. 95: 15 εγω δε επι σε ηλπισα κε ειπα συ ει ο θς μ(ου) 16 εν ταις χερσιν σου οι κληροι μου ρυσαι με εκ χειρος εχθρων μου και εκ των καταδιωκοντων με. See the image of this folio at http://codexsinaiticus.com/en/manuscript.aspx?book=26&chapter=30&verse=16.

53 Origen, *Selecta in Psalmos* (fragmenta e catenis), PG 12, col. 1301 line 4: Ἐν ταῖς χερσί σου οἱ κλῆροί μου, ῥῦσαί με ἐκ χειρὸς ἐχθρῶν μου, καὶ ἐκ τῶν καταδιωκόντων με, κ. τ. ἑ. Κλῆροι τῶν δικαίων ἀνθρώπων εἰσὶν αἱ ὑπὸ τῶν ἁγίων ἀγγέλων γινωσκόμεναι θεωρίαι. Despite the recent discovery of 29 homilies by Origen on the Psalter, Origen's commentaries or sermons on Ps. 30 are unfortunately lost and only the line from the catenae survives. However, the newly discovered Homilies on the Psalms by Origen in the Munich codex show great overlaps with the catenae, so that we do not have to consider them dubious, even though they often only contain very small fragments, Lorenzo Perrone, "Einleitung," *Origenes Werke*, vol. 13, Die neuen Psalmenhomilien, GCS, N.F. 19 (2015), 7.

54 For instance, Eusebius, Athanasius, Didymus the Blind, and Cyril of Alexandria.

55 Theodoret, *Interpretatio in Psalmos* (PG 80, col 1081 lines 38, 41) knows both readings: Τοῦτο γὰρ λέγει· (40) "Ἐν ταῖς χερσί σου οἱ κλῆροί μου," ἢ ὡς οἱ λοιποὶ, ἐν ταῖς χερσί σου οἱ καιροί μου. Theodoret, *Commentary on Psalms*, trans. Robert C. Hill, Fathers of the Church (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press: 2000), 195 (italics as in original): "Now, in this he is suggesting also the abuse of Shimei. *As they assembled together against me they plotted to take my life. But I hoped in you, O Lord; I said, You are my God, my lot is in your hands* (vv. 13–15): so while they gathered together and plotted my death, I knew you to be my God and ruler. He says, my lot is in your hands, or as the rest say, 'my times are in your hands,' that is, You allot to each as you will faintheartedness and exhilaration, and in turn you reverse these as you please; he calls 'times' or lot the changes in circumstances – wealth and poverty, slavery and lordship, peace and war, and likewise the other things of this kind."

An answer in the *Sortes Monacenses* captures this well: "Take care not to doubt (or hesitate): begin now already and you will accomplish what you wish and you will arrive in your hands at what [you are] doubtful of …"[56] The client's hands held the dice or other lots, just like God's hands.

But it is not only this verse of the psalm that is relevant for inquirers. Psalm 30 (31) itself occupies a significant place in Christian theology and liturgy. It is from this psalm that Jesus quotes on the cross in Luke 23:47: "into your hands I commend my spirit" (Ps 30:5). God's hands and the hands of enemies are pointedly contrasted in the text (5, 9, 16) and in the midst of attack it is hope in God that will save the one who calls out "Lend your ear to me" (3). In its Septuagint and Vulgate versions, the psalm addresses the God of truth (6, 24) as it asks for protection from deceitful lies (19, 21). The inquirer hopes for no less.

In his commentary on the verse, Augustine asks: "What are these lots? Why lots? When we hear the word 'lots' we should not look for lot diviners. For a lot is not something evil; rather, it is a thing that indicates God's will in the midst of human doubt."[57] Augustine walks the fine line of attributing the decision of lots to God while dismissing the importance of lot diviners. And, as the contributions in this book show, people in late antiquity would be intimately familiar with the practice of consulting lots. In a way, one could say that the chapters in this book attempt to answer Augustine's questions: "What are these lots? Why lots?"

The chapters in this volume are not organized into separate sections, but rather along a spectrum of closely interconnected topics. At the beginning of the volume, following the survey of divinatory texts in chapter one, are found two chapters that emphasize modes of instrumentality: one focusing on the instruments used in lot divination (Klingshirn) and the other on the human body itself used in twitch divination (Costanza).

At the end of the volume are chapters that focus on some of the most acute theological problems posed by lot divination: the role of Fate and free will (Nasrallah) and the relationship of lots to prayer and doubt (Luijendijk).

Between these chapters, in the bulk of the volume, are found six chapters that deal mainly with the texts found in the various "families" of lots, and three chapters that problematize the practice of lot divination in Egypt, where the

56 L. VI. V. III. *Caue ne dubites; iam nunc incipe et perficies quod desideras et peruenies ad in manibus tuis quod dubius esse; quod speras a te omiti non debet quod perueniet*, ed. Harris (1901), rev. Montero Cartelle (2013).

57 *In manibus tuis sortes meae: non in manibus hominum, sed in manibus tuis. Quae sunt istae sortes? quare sortes? Audito nomine sortium, non debemus sortilegos quaerere. Sors enim non aliquid mali est: sed res est in dubitatione humana divinam indicans voluntatem.*

fullest written record of such divinatory activity can be found. Among the families treated by authors in this volume are lots based on sacred books, such as the Bible and Homeric epics (Wilkinson, Childers, Meerson, and Van der Horst), so-called "Books of Fate" that generate answers according to a fixed algorithm (Stewart), and collections of *sortes* with general answers (Kocar). The remaining chapters treat the ritual and scribal contexts in which lot diviners operated in Egypt (Frankfurter) and the functions that lot divination performed in the judicial and economic realms (Naether, Ratzan).

Envisioned another way, this method of organization invites readers to pursue questions relating to lot divination, broadly speaking, in their material and textual manifestations (chapters 1–9) as well as in the social and theological contexts that framed these operations (chapters 10–14). We hope that the result offers a breadth and depth of coverage that can serve not only as a summary of past research and a showcase for contemporary work, but also as an introduction and enticement to future research.

4 Avenues for Further Research

In the past decades, the corpus of lot books has expanded greatly and several of the texts discussed in this volume have been published rather recently.[58] This book then is a first step into integrating them into different fields of scholarship and bringing them to a larger audience. We also hope their inclusion in this book will spark further scholarship on these sources. As is apparent from the overview in chapter one, multiple lot systems have not been fully studied or even translated into a modern language. Moreover, since lot texts have only recently been receiving broader scholarly attention, there may be additional, still unidentified lot texts in manuscript collections, for it has happened frequently that they were initially misidentified, and labeled, for instance, as "prayer." The fact that many lot texts were not recognized as such either in earlier publications or in library catalogues suggests that scholars should be alert for additional sources.

One other area of further research involves the complex issue of the spread of *sortes* geographically, around the Mediterranean and more widely, along the

58 As far as we know, forthcoming are an edition of the Hoskyns Fragment in Dialect *M* by Wolf-Peter Funk (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 541 no. 78), a Palestinian Jewish Aramaic lot book from the Cairo Genizah by Gideon Bohak (both mentioned in chapter one below), and Alex Kocar's discussion of two fragments from Oxyrhynchus (see chapter nine below).

Silk Road. How were these *sortes* – with their similar topics and techniques of consultation and even sometimes similar sounding language – composed? Did the writers of lot books borrow from other *sortes*? And can we detect patterns behind the spread of these texts, for instance, in the practice of ticket oracles in Egypt and in the Gaul of Gregory of Tours in the sixth century, or in the *rhiktologia*? With respect to the spread of *sortes*, it is worth noting that many lot texts deal with journeys. Travelers often consulted about their lot before departure. It is possible that these travelers may have also introduced lot texts and instruments of lot divination in other regions, thereby stimulating the distribution and hybridization of *sortes*. Just as with the spread of other every day technologies, these developments can prove difficult to trace for historians. Since, as multiple contributions in this volume show, *sortes* are frequently attested along trade routes (e.g., the oracles from the praesidium at Dios) and in trade centers (Sortes Alearum), and also in places of pilgrimage (Shrine of Philoxenus at Oxyrhynchus, ticket oracles from the Shrine of Colluthus at Antinoë), it seems that network theory could be applied fruitfully to map the spread of *sortes* along trade and pilgrimage routes.[59]

Relatedly, *sortes* and divination more broadly form an excellent topic for the burgeoning field of comparative antiquity. Is there, for instance, a connection between the I-Ching in China and Mediterranean lot books, or as Wim van Binsbergen has suggested,[60] between Mediterranean lot divination and Islamic and African geomancy? And, methodologically, how would one go about determining that? Michel Strickmann addressed this topic in *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy: The Written Oracle in East Asia*, posthumously published in 2005. He concluded that each lot text was related to another one. The expanded number of texts currently available and new methodologies such as network theory could advance scholarship on divination in this larger, global sense.

To take this further, scholars interested in concepts of "living texts" or *mouvance*, à la Paul Zumthor, could incorporate *sortes* into their findings.[61]

59 On network theory, see, for instance, Irad Malkin, Christy Constantakopoulou, and Katerina Panagopoulou, *Greek and Roman Networks in the Mediterranean* (Routledge, 2013); Irad Malkin, *A Small Greek World: Networks in the Ancient Mediterranean* (Oxford University Press, 2011). Cavan Concannon uses archaeological evidence for large Mediterranean trade routes to interpret the epistolary network of second-century bishop Dionysius of Corinth; see his *Assembling Early Christianity: Trade, Networks, and the Letters of Dionysios of Corinth* (Cambridge University Press, 2017).

60 Wim van Binsbergen, "Rethinking Africa's Contribution to Global Cultural History: Lessons from a comparative historical analysis of mankala board-games and geomantic divination," *Talanta: Proceedings of the Dutch Archaeological and Historical Society* 28–29 (1996–1997): 219–51.

61 Paul Zumthor, *Essai de poetique médiévale*, Poétique (Paris: Le Seuil, 1972).

Those doing so-called New Philology or Material Philology could research the ways these different books are transmitted, copied and used, by looking for example at handwriting, marginalia, stains, and other signs of wear and tear in order to understand better how the scribes and owners of these lot books engaged with them.

Additionally, in a larger scope of understanding sortilege, mostly outside of the timeframe of this book, it would be desirable to have studies examining the texts that are paired with *sortes* in manuscripts. While certain lot texts circulated in single book format, other lot texts formed part of larger collections of divinatory and magical texts. This gathering of what a scribe or collector supposedly took as related materials happened in the Byzantine period/Middle Ages, as for example with the Greek manuscript of the Sortes Barberinianae examined below by Randall Stewart, but also already in late antiquity. PGM VII (P.Lond. I 121) is a large roll, with multiple different texts. In addition to the Homer oracle, with which it opens, it includes multiple recipes and spells (against coughing, fever, headache, scorpion stings, insomnia, swollen breasts, and many more), and other sections relating to divination, such as divination through a boy, several requests for dream oracles and a hemerologion, that is, a list of days and times suitable for divination, and an astrological calendar.[62] An intriguing later example is a codex now at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris, BNF gr. 2243. This scholarly book contains a *rhiktologion* but also astronomical texts, a botanical lexicon, medicinal recipes, and illustrations. It was copied in the year 1339 by Kosmas Kamelos, a priest and exarch of Athens, for a physician who had commissioned it.[63] This suggests that this physician would work with numerous different techniques for healing, including divination.[64]

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62 Translation in Hans Dieter Betz, ed., *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 112–45. Frederic Kenyon, editor of P.Lond. I 121 (PGM VII), characterized the papyrus as "the longest of the magical papyri in the British Museum, though … not the most interesting. The beginning is lost, and two or three of the earlier column are in a fragmentary state…. The first section of the work consists merely of a number of single lines taken, without any regard to sense or on any discernible principle, from the Iliad and Odyssey, arranged and numbered in groups of six, and amounting to 216 …" (p. 83). On two different Demotic-Greek magical handbooks, see Jacco Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites* (Leiden: Brill, 2005). More generally see also the project headed by Christopher Faraone and Sofía Torallas Tovar, "Transmission of Magical Knowledge in Antiquity: The Papyrus Magical Handbooks in Context" (https://papyrusmagicalhandbook.wordpress.com).

63 For information, see http://pinakes.irht.cnrs.fr/notices/cote/51872/.

64 Incidentally, the Paris manuscript is one of only two lot manuscripts not transmitted anonymously. The second case is very late for our point of view: the *rhiktologion* copied at Amorgos on October 22, 1847 by a certain Michael Nomikos. See Georgios A. Megas, "ΡΙΚΤΟΛΟΓΙΟΝ ΕΞ ΑΜΟΡΓΟΥ," *ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΟΝΙΚΗ ΕΠΕΤΗΡΙΣ* 9 (1958): 207–16.

The persistence of such textual associations in manuscripts suggest that future research should intensify the search for links between lot divination and other ritual practices, including other methods of divination, healing, and magic.[65] Indeed, beyond its expression in texts, future research could also focus in general more deeply on the material setting of lot divination: its locations, instruments, practices, and rituals. Especially where our evidence is very sparse, the anthropological study of divinatory practices in the recent past and present can suggest some of the questions to be asked about the experience of lot divination in the deep past of the ancient Mediterranean. The more we recognize the central role that ancient lot divination played in cultural strategies for survival and success and the apprehension of meaning in a disordered world, the more we can integrate its study into a larger and more generous investigation of the past and its present and future.

65 Healing and lot divination are also connected at, for instance, the Shrine of Saint Colluthus in Antinoë, Egypt. See AnneMarie Luijendijk, "'If you order that I wash my feet, then bring me this ticket': Encountering Saint Colluthus at Antinoë," in Mika Ahuvia and Alex Kocar, eds., *Placing Ancient Texts. The Ritual and Rhetorical Use of Space*, TSAJ (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 197–225.

CHAPTER 1

The Literature of Lot Divination

AnneMarie Luijendijk and William E. Klingshirn

1 Lots in Late Antiquity

This chapter centers on the textual evidence for divination by means of casting lots during late antiquity, roughly from the third through the eighth century. Because of the haphazard way in which lot texts have been studied, they have never been properly classified. This chapter sketches the features of the lot-divinatory genre and the techniques of sortilege and then presents a classification of lot texts into four groups. Using this categorization, we introduce the major *sortes* collections of this period.

Late antiquity is a fruitful and transformative period in which to study these textual lot practices. Although the chapter's main chronological focus is late antiquity, the availability of the sources at times stretches these chronological boundaries backward into the Graeco-Roman period, Pharaonic Egypt or the Ancient Near East, and forward into the early Middle Ages.[1] Egyptian ticket oracles, for instance, can be traced back to oracles attested already in the Pharaonic period.[2] At the other end of the timeframe, Byzantine and western medieval manuscripts often preserve a more complete record of late antique textual material that exists only in fragments. This is, for example, the case with a fifth-century papyrus fragment in Greek that overlaps with a text copied in

1 As Peter Brown famously said, late antiquity ends "always later than you think." Quoted in Jamie Kreiner and Helmut Reimitz, eds., *Motions of Late Antiquity: Essays on Religion, Politics, and Society in Honour of Peter Brown*, vol. 20, *Cultural Encounters in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Turnhout, Belgium: Brepols, 2016), front matter. Several scholars have drawn long historical or broad geographical lines on divination: for instance, Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy: The Written Oracle in East Asia* (Stanford University Press, 2005), on the similarities of such practices East-West, and Patricia Crone and Adam Silverstein, "The Ancient Near East and Islam: The Case of Lot-Casting," *Journal of Semitic Studies* 55.2 (2010): 423–50, on the continuation of lot casting (not lot divination *per se*) from the Ancient Near East up to modern times.

2 On continuation of practices in Egypt, see David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) and other publications by the same author, and Franziska Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi: Problemlösungsstrategien durch Orakel im römischen Ägypten*, ORA 3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

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fourteenth-century Byzantine manuscripts under the name *Rhiktologion* and even in a nineteenth-century copy from the Greek island of Amorgos (see below).

In recent years, sortilege in late antiquity as a field of scholarly inquiry has been in flux, because of the publication of multiple new primary sources, the (re-)edition of previously known texts, and the application of new scholarly perspectives. As many inhabitants of the Roman Empire became Christians in these centuries, they reacted differently to earlier so-called "pagan" texts and practices in general, and to lot divination in particular. Rebuttal was one strategy, adaptation of earlier practices another. In some cases, older texts still in use were transmitted with little alteration, such as the Homeromanteion studied by Michael Meerson in this volume. In other cases, existing lot texts were adapted, particularly for use by Christians or Jews, or more generally updated to fit the situation of their time. A provocative example is use of the Sortes Astrampsychi, a Greek text that had come into being in the Roman period and was gradually Christianized in Greek and also adapted into a Latin lot system, the Sortes Sangallenses. New sources and techniques also proliferated, such as the *hermēneiai* (or Sortes Ioannenses, see below) penned in the margins of biblical books discussed in chapters by Jeff Childers and Kevin Wilkinson. Furthermore, recent scholarship on divination has taken an anthropological/ethnographical turn, where insights gleaned from present day divinatory practices are considered to understand ancient divination.[3]

A variety of causes for the proliferation of lot books after the fourth century can be suggested. David Frankfurter found that different types of divination expanded in the Roman period due to social developments, such as increased mobility and economic opportunity.[4] Jacco Dieleman argued that the increase in oracular practices that developed out of cultural and religious interactions

3 This scholarship builds, for instance, on the work of Philip Peek, fundamentally, his introduction to *African Divination Systems: Ways of Knowing*, edited by Philip M. Peek (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1991), 1–22, and David Zeitlyn, most recently, "Divinatory Logics: Diagnoses and Predictions Mediating Outcomes," *Current Anthropology* 53.5 (2012): 525–546. See especially publications by David Frankfurter and William Klingshirn.

4 David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 156–57: "The social changes and increasing stress of the Roman period may well have led to a diversification of the means of divination, which as a ritual process typically functions to resolve social tensions and private anxieties, to direct action in unstable circumstances, and to integrate the individual with a coherent religious cosmology.... A society of greater mobility and economic opportunity might well require oracles in more continuous accessibility than could have been offered by traditional processional oracles."

led to competition that then sparked more innovation.[5] What these scholars sketched for Roman Egypt in particular holds likely true for the larger Mediterranean region, and for the period of late antiquity.

Another factor in the increased production of lot books in this period may relate to a technological change in book production, that is, the use of the codex instead of the book roll as material carrier of texts.[6] With its sequential pages, the codex formed a new canvas for distributing and accessing lot texts and especially enabled the practice of bibliomancy.[7] Some manuscripts with Sortes Ioannenses or *hermēneiai* probably were consulted through bibliomancy, while the Gospel of the Lots of Mary employs the pages of the codex so that every two opened pages form one answer, thus facilitating the location of an answer.[8]

At the same time as this new book medium offered different opportunities for systems of selecting oracles, other technologies went out of fashion. This is, for instance, the case with oracle inscriptions from Asia Minor erected at prominent places in the High Empire (second-third century). The marble writing surface ensured that lot texts were very durable, but it is unclear how long they were

5 Jacco Dieleman, "Coping with a Difficult Life: Magic, Healing, and Sacred Knowledge," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, ed. Christina Riggs (Oxford University Press, 2012), 339: "In the light of these shifts, it can be assumed that the marketplace of freelance diviners, healers, and magicians had diversified – and as a result become more competitive than in the Pharaonic period. The high degree of innovation may then well be a product of this heightened competition and not just a reflection of linguistic, social, and cultural transformations in contemporary society." According to Robin Lane Fox (*Pagans and Christians* [New York: Knopf, 1987], 212), "Like a younger, freer economy, the Greek world had pillaged its neighbors' techniques, refined them into general theories and made prophecy, divination and oracles a major industry." See also Ratzan in this volume.

6 Christoph Benjamin Schulz, *Poetiken des Blätterns* (Georg Olms Verlag, 2015), esp. section 1.3 "Der Kodex und die Erfindung des Blätterns," p. 32 ff. More broadly on the impact of the codex, see also Anthony Grafton and Megan Williams, *Christianity and the Transformation of the Book: Origen, Eusebius, and the Library of Caesarea* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2006).

7 About bibliomancy, see Schulz, *Poetiken des Blätterns*, 27: "Seit der Spätantike, seit sich der Kodex, das Buch mit seinen, gegenüber dem Volumen, der Buchrolle, als Datenträger und Distributionsmedium schriftlicher Darstellungen durchgesetzt hat, bestehen Bücher aus Seiten. Und aus dieser Struktur des Buches ergibt sich eine bemerkenswerte und folgenreiche Konsequenz. Der Kodex sequentialisiert das Gewebe des Texts unabhängig von möglichen textimmanenten Gliederungen wie Absätzen oder Kapiteln. Er *verräumlicht* den Text.… Ein Buch kann nicht nur, es muß sogar geblättert werden, um überhaupt gelesen werden zu können."

8 That is, the Gospel of the Lots of Mary as preserved in the Harvard Codex, see AnneMarie Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles? The Gospel of the Lots of Mary*, STAC 89 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 64.

actually in use. So far no inscriptions erected later than the third century have been found, which may signal a decline in use after this time. Possibly, these *sortes* circulated also in manuscript format. It has been suggested that they were first copied from wooden tablets,[9] but of course, unlike in the dry sands of Egypt, manuscripts do not normally survive in this region.

2 Genre

Lot texts are not intended to be read sequentially, from cover to cover, but rather as individual *sortes* that answer questions. "You'll recover from your sickness. Don't be distressed," reads one answer in the Sortes Astrampsychi.[10] "God will help you concerning what you want. Ask God, you will come quickly to what you desire," according to an answer in the Sortes Sanctorum.[11] Lot texts possess numerous elements that make them distinguishable: The answers focus exclusively on the issues of the individual, the inquirer.[12] Fritz Graf and William Klingshirn both

9 Ernst Kalinka and Johannes Nollé both presuppose that the dice oracles on inscriptions from respectively Thrace (Bulgaria) and Asia Minor (Turkey) had been copied at one point from wooden tablets. Ernst Kalinka thinks that the Thracian oracle inscription was copied from a wooden tablet in three sections. "Die mir bekannten [Würfelorakel] stammen alle aus Kleinasien und sind in daktylischen Hexametern abgefaßt … Es dürfte sich gleich dem Original (wenn Z. 5 πινάκων richtig ergänzt ist) auf mehrere (drei?) Tafeln (πίνακες) erstreckt haben, deren jede vermutlich ihr Präskript hatte." In *Antike Denkmäler in Bulgarien* (Vienna, 1906), 147. According to Nollé, the oracle inscriptions from Asia Minor may have derived from wooden tablets that belonged to traveling diviners for ease of transportation, see his *Kleinasiatische Losorakel: Astragal – und Alphabetchresmologien der hochkaiserzeitlichen Orakelrenaissance*, Vestigia 57 (München: C. H. Beck, 2007), 25: "Die vorgefertigten Sprüche von Losorakeln konnten, wie Quellenzeugnisse aus dem griechischen Mutterland belegen, auf geweißten Holztafeln stehen, die im Griechischen als πίναξ bezeichnet wurden. Besonders umherziehende Wahrsager haben sich aus naheliegenden Gründen solcher zusammenklappbaren und somit verhältnismäßig leicht transportierbaren Tafeln bedient."

10 σώζῃ ἀσθενῶν. μὴ ἀγωνία, Sortes Astrampsychi 100–8–42. Edition: Randall Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. 2 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1983), 83, trans. Randall Stewart and Kenneth Morrell, "Fortune-Telling. Anonymous, The Oracles of Astrampsychus," in *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature*, ed. William F. Hansen (Indiana University Press, 1998), 323.

11 *Deus te adiuvabit de quo cupis. Deum roga, cito pervenies ad quod desideras*. Sortes Sanctorum C. C. Edition: Enrique Montero Cartelle, ed., *Les sortes sanctorum: étude, édition critique et traduction*, Textes littéraires du Moyen Âge 27, Série Divinatoria 3 (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013), 72.

12 Alban Dold even describes the Sortes Sangallenses as egoistic ("die so kraß egoistischen Äußerungen"), but that seems too strong. Alban Dold, *Die Orakelsprüche im St. Galler*

speak of the narratological aspect of the *sortes*.[13] These texts address the client in the present tense, in the second person singular in the voice of the oracle, or what Carl Jung in the case of another divinatory text, the I-Ching, called "the living soul of the book."[14] Some texts even address the querent repeatedly as "O human." Often the oracle speaks in the imperative, making the answers exhortations. As communication between a text and an inquirer, the text has "a voice of quite peculiar intimacy, for the querent goes to it for counsel and it speaks to him or her directly."[15] The questions commonly imagine an elite male audience.[16] But several systems include questions from enslaved people, often about gaining freedom.[17] For women, texts could be modified simply and on the spot by changing the gender.[18]

Palimpsestcodex 908 (*die sogenannten 'Sortes Sangallenses'*), vol. 225/4, SÖAW.PH (Vienna: Rudolf M. Rohrer, 1948), 17.

13 William E. Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul: The *Sortes Sangallenses*," in Johnston and Struck, *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, 106: "Narratologically, it is important to note that the text of the *Sortes Sangallenses* speaks in the first person to a client in the second person, at a narrative instant in the present. Although it sometimes speaks grammatically in the first person … it more often speaks in a present or future imperative … Most often it simply narrates what is the case …" And ibid., 107: "As in earlier systems of Latin lot divination, it is the *sors* itself and not the diviner that speaks…. The diviner's job is to provide inquirers with access to the knowledge encoded in the *sors* along with an interpretation of it." See also Fritz Graf, "Rolling the Dice for an Answer," in Johnston and Struck, *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, 66: "The implied narrator of our oracles speaks in the first person singular, and he addresses a reader whom he sees as interacting with him."

14 C. G. Jung, *The I Ching, or Book of Changes*, trans. Richard Wilhelm and Cary F. Baynes, 3rd edition. (Lincolnwood, IL: Princeton University Press, 1967), 6. Jung (ibid.) proposes: "Why not venture a dialogue with an ancient book that purports to be animated."

15 Strickmann, *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy*, 141.

16 See especially Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 276–77. According to Karl Strobel, the questions in the Sortes Astrampsychi are deliberately phrased so that "der mögliche Kundenkreis umfassend angesprochen werden konnte, und zwar vom Angehörigen des Churialenstandes bis zum Sklaven, von den Fragen nach *honores* bis zur Frage nach dem Drohen von Anachoresis … oder nach dem Verkauftwerden eines Sklaven." Strobel, "Soziale Wirklichkeit und irrationales Weltverstehen in der Kaiserzeit I: Sortes Astrampsychi und Sortes Sangallenses," *Laverna* 3 (1992): 132. Whereas the Sortes Sangallenses with their late-Latin-vulgar influence aim at "die einfacheren Bevölkerungsschichten" such as farmers, craftspeople, merchants or slaves, but also included concerns of Curiales and desires for social advancement into magistrature. "Höhere soziale Gruppen sind nur als Bezugsobjekte enthalten, wobei der Wert der Protektion durch Patroni besonders hervorgehoben wird" (ibid., 135).

17 Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 266–70; Fridolf Kudlien, *Sklaven-Mentalität im Spiegel antiker Wahrsagerei* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1991), and a discussion of the latter by Niall McKeown, *The Invention of Ancient Slavery* (Duckworth, 2007), ch. 2.

18 See Willy Clarysse and Francisca A.J. Hoogendijk, "De Sortes van Astrampsychus. Een orakelboek uit de Oudheid bewerkt voor het Middelbaar Onderwijs," *Kleio* 11 (1981): 57.

As we saw in the introduction, these oracle answers assume and assure their users of God's knowledge. In addition, many *sortes* texts contain time references that either give them a sense of urgency and imminence, such as "in a little while" or "immediately," or appeal to patience, "wait" or "endure." Overall, *sortes* exhibit a binary worldview, sharply distinguishing between good and bad: happiness, health, and prosperity versus oppression, illness, and death. Answers can be positive or negative or even a combination, but in most *sortes* texts, positive answers slightly outweigh the negative ones.[19] The method of formulating questions and retrieving answers (on which see below) greatly impacts the texts. Lot systems that work with specific questions give concrete answers to these questions. But in the kind of lot texts that operated without a fixed set of questions, the answers are general and therefore applicable in many situations. In such texts, the client's situation is referred to with vague words signifying "thing" or "matter" (e.g., Greek πράγμα, Latin *res*, Coptic ϩⲱⲃ), in other words, the "problem at hand."[20]

Some lot texts, such as the Sortes Alearum, the dice oracle inscriptions from Asia Minor (see below), are phrased in hexameters, the characteristic meter of Greek oracles; others rhyme, such as the Latin Sortes Duodecim Patriarcharum (see below). But most *sortes* are formulated in prose.[21]

3 A "Gorgeous Mantic Polyphony"[22]

An intriguing aspect of the different *sortes* texts is how similar and yet distinct they are, evoking questions of how they relate to each other and how they were disseminated. Greek cleromantic traditions were freely translated, and from around the Mediterranean there are texts in Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Coptic, Syriac, Armenian and Georgian.[23] These texts in their different manuscripts,

19 See Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?* 26–27; Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 204–6.

20 William E. Klingshirn, "Inventing the *sortilegus*: Lot Divination and Cultural Identity in Italy, Rome, and the Provinces," in *Religion in Republican Italy*, ed. Celia E. Schultz and Paul B. Harvey, YCS 33 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 151 n. 60: "For the use of *res* in divinatory contexts to mean 'the problem at hand' or 'the substance of the divinatory inquiry', see Cic. *Div*. 1.34…."

21 The fact that *sortes* are in prose and not in hexameters indicates that "they were not represented as deriving directly from Greek shrines." So William E. Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul: The *Sortes Sangallenses*," in Johnston and Struck, *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, 107–8.

22 The expression is from Strickmann, *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy*, 142.

23 Naether (*Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 311) rightly states that these diverse lot books and ticket oracles should be contextualized within the long tradition of the genre. She argues

recensions, and languages relate to each other in highly complex ways. The fact that these rather mundane traditions were transmitted so widely suggests that they deeply appealed to the ancients. The diverse *sortes* traditions, distinct but related, bring to the fore a fascinating web of cultural contact, as Johannes Bolte and Michel Strickmann have shown. With all their everyday qualities, these *sortes* offer an in-depth perspective into the history of cultural exchange and contact. Sinologist Strickmann expressed the bold position, "that every member of the extended corpus of oracles we have considered came into being in full awareness of some other member of the corpus."[24] He calls the ensemble a "gorgeous mantic polyphony." What we encounter in the transmission of *sortes* are fluid texts and free, creative lines of textual transmission so that these different lot texts cannot be squeezed into traditional scholarly manuscript stemmata. (Nor is this unique to *sortes* literature.[25]) Rather, this awareness of other *sortes* is through a combination of oral and textual encounters and the deliberate use of the genre. We offer here an outline of the different techniques and literary families by which the texts of lot divination can be categorized.

4 "What Are These Lots?" An Overview of Different Techniques of Sortilege

The people that populated the cities and towns around the Mediterranean in late antiquity had numerous options for using lots to make everyday decisions,

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"dass die Sortes Astrampsychi, Sangallenses, Sanctorum und die Ticket-Orakel nicht als Monolithen der divinatorischen Literatur des Mittelmeerraums wahrgenommen werden, sondern sich eingebettet innerhalb jahrtausendelanger Traditionen eines Genres kontextualisieren lassen können. Losen ist eine universelle anthropologische Situation, die je nach Beurteilung in einer Kultur oder einer sozialen Einbindung qua normhierarchischer Verrottung der Loszeremonie inmitten weiterer ritueller Gattungen unterschiedlich bewertet wurde und wird."

24 Strickmann, *Chinese Poetry and Prophecy*, 142. See also Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul," 101: "All these texts [i.e. Latin lot books] share certain similarities: they belong to a type of lot divination in which questions are answered by consulting a fixed array of responses; they were written in Latin but translated or adapted from Greek models; they can be organized into definite families based on those models; they borrow freely from one another, and they can be labeled, to a greater or lesser degree, 'Christian.' They are also in many respects very difficult to place in their proper context."

25 See, for instance, Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug, eds., *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, TUGAL, Band 175 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017); Eva Mroczek, *The Literary Imagination in Jewish Antiquity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

what Pieter van der Horst characterizes as "a bewildering variety of choices."[26] Discussions in ancient literature testify to this choice, as do the large number of surviving manuscripts. Lot texts have been found, for example, in the market square of Kremna in Asia Minor,[27] the church at Nessana in the Negev Desert,[28] the Shrine of Saint Colluthus in Antinoë, Egypt, a Syriac codex,[29] and a palimpsest manuscript from Gaul. These lot texts from around the Mediterranean are preserved in multiple languages and on different writing surfaces, such as papyrus, parchment, and stone (inscriptions).[30]

To give an impression of the opportunities people had to consult different systems of lot divination, whether locally or through pilgrimage, it is worth noting that several papyrus fragments containing parts of the Sortes Astrampsychi were discovered at Oxyrhynchus, the same city where also the Coptic divinatory fragments discussed by Alex Kocar in this volume were found. From the Shrine of Saint Colluthus in Antinoë, also in Egypt, have come some two hundred oracle tickets and a fragment of the Gospel of the Lots of Mary. If indeed these divinatory texts were in use at the same time, what we thus see in these Egyptian cities – due to the region's beneficial preservation circumstances for the kinds of organic materials that most texts were written on – is that inhabitants of a city or visitors at a shrine had multiple options to consult divinatory texts. Presumably such a variety of practices was not unique to these Egyptian cities, but generally representative, with all local differences of the various kinds of divinatory services offered around the Mediterranean in late antiquity.[31]

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26 Pieter W. van der Horst, "Sortes: Sacred Books as Instant Oracles in Late Antiquity," in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, 143: "In the official and in the private sphere there was a bewildering variety of choices."

27 Nollé (*Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 24) provides an overview of the position of all 21 oracle inscriptions from Asia Minor. The one in Kremna was placed in the Hadrianic agora.

28 P. Ness. II 3 and 4 (6th century). The site of Nessana, 'Auja-el-Hafir, in the Negev desert was excavated in 1936–1937 by the Colt Archaeological Expedition, directed by H. Dunscombe Colt. On the church, see H. Dunscombe Colt, "Foreword," in *Excavations at Nessana*, vol. 2: *Literary Papyri*, ed. Lionel Casson and Ernest L. Hettich (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950): "a small church and from a room attached to it the great majority of the papyri was recovered." The Nessana find also includes a text that refers to the casting of lots to decide an inheritance between three brothers, P. Ness. III 21, see the discussion by Crone and Silverstein, "The Ancient Near East and Islam," 424.

29 See Jeff Childers's contribution in this volume.

30 They may also have been transmitted on wooden tablets, now lost to history, see footnote 9 above.

31 On the question of Egypt's distinctness or not in the larger Mediterranean, see, for instance, Roger S. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 12; Bagnall, "Models and Evidence in the Study of Religion in Late Roman Egypt,"

For a modern scholar, the number of distinct but related lot books, their editions and translations can be bewildering, especially since a comprehensive publication of all the different sources with critical edition and translation into a modern scholarly language is lacking. The classification that follows is a modest and hopefully helpful contribution intended to begin to address this lacuna by providing an overview of these texts. *Sortes* can be grouped in different ways, by text type (specific or general answers) or by technology (how the answer is retrieved: throwing dice, pricking, dropping a grain on a chart, opening a book at random and so on).[32] Based upon the method of organization and the distinct technologies applied to obtain an answer, we distinguish four groups of lot texts: (1) Texts with a list of fixed questions and answers, so-called Books of Fate; (2) Texts consisting only of general answers, without preformulated questions; (3) Texts that purport to interpret a sacred book, and (4) Individualized *sortes*. Given the nature and transmission of the *sortes*, there is some hybridity between these groups, especially between groups 2 and 3. In what follows, we discuss succinctly the members of each of these groups and provide references to editions, translations and studies of these texts.

5 Group 1: Books of Fate

This category consists of texts with a list of concrete questions[33] and matching, short answers that are grouped into sections of ten or twelve answers (decads

in *From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity*, ed. Johannes Hahn, Stephen Emmel, and Ulrich Gotter, RGRW 163 (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 30.

32 But as Theodore Skeat stated: "the structure of a Book of Fate remains unaltered whether the inquirer uses dice, a volvelle, geomancy or other methods for this purpose, and groupings such as 'Würfelorakel', 'Stechorakel' and the like are not only useless but positively misleading, since they are apt to bring together under one head works essentially disparate in character." Skeat, "An Early Mediaeval 'Book of Fate': The Sortes XII Patriarcharum," *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 3 (1954): 54.

33 The oldest lot divination text accompanied by a list of questions may be the so-called Sortes Isiacae, a fragmentarily preserved and difficult text on a Demotic papyrus, found at the temple library in Soknopaiou Nesou in the Fayum oasis and now in the Österreichische Nationalbibliothek in Vienna. It dates to the second half of the first century CE. Edition: Martin Andreas Stadler, "Isis, das göttliche Kind und die Weltordnung. Prolegomena zur Deutung des unpublizierten Papyrus Wien D. 12006 recto," in *Ägyptische Mysterien?*, ed. Jan Assmann and Martin Bommas, Reihe Kulte/Kulturen (München: Fink, 2002), 109–25; Martin Andreas Stadler, *Isis, das göttliche Kind und die Weltordnung: neue religiöse Texte aus dem Fayum nach dem Papyrus Wien D, 12006 recto*, Mitteilungen aus der

or dodecads) and accessed by a complicated algorithm.[34] The defining characteristic of such Books of Fate is, as Theodore Skeat phrased it, "the (apparently) miraculous manner in which the inquirer, pursuing his [or her] way through a labyrinth of jumbled answers, finally arrives at one appropriate to the question asked."[35]

5.1 *Sortes Astrampsychi*

A consummate example of a Book of Fate is found in the Sortes Astrampsychi. Perhaps composed in the late first century CE[36] and frequently attested in late antique papyri, the Sortes Astrampsychi is an anonymous text with a prefacing pseudonymous letter under the name of the Egyptian magician Astrampsychus.[37] The oracle consists of a list of 92 questions numbered from

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Papyrussammlung der Österreichischen Nationalbibliothek 22 (Vienna: Brüder Hollinek, 2004). For additional discussion and evaluation, see Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 333–36. The text consists of two parts: the first a catalogue with questions and the second mythological statements. The relationship between the two parts is disputed in the scholarly literature: Quack and Naether argue that the first part is a form of lot divination with a die (this is also the interpretation of Quack in a review), but Stadler argues against this interpretation in his "Isis würfelt nicht," *Studi di Egittologia e di Papirologia* 3 (2006): 187–203.

34 Theodore Skeat proposed the name 'Book of Fate' for lot books that have lists of questions and answers. Skeat distinguishes between 'Books of Fate,' namely lot systems with "a fixed table of specific questions with a fixed number of alternative answers to each question" and systems such as the Sortes Sanctorum, which "instead of answering a specific question, forecast the inquirer's 'fortune' in general terms." Skeat, "An Early Mediaeval 'Book of Fate,'" 54.

35 Ibid.

36 Randall Stewart, "The Textual Transmission of the 'Sortes Astrampsychi,'" *ICS* 20 (1995): 136. He refers to private correspondence between G. M. Browne and T. C. Skeat (ibid., 136 n. 9). The earliest attestation of the Sortes Astrampsychi is a papyrus from Egypt dated to around the year 236 (P. Lugd. Bat. XXV 8), see ibid., 138. Beyond this, the date and place of composition remain unknown. Stewart writes (ibid.): "Not only are the date and provenance of the Sortes Astrampsychi uncertain, but the serpentine course by which the text, in what appears to be two ecdoses, has been transmitted through the centuries to our age is as mysterious at first glance as the workings of that oracular book must have been to those who consulted it for counsel and prognostication."

37 The letter is addressed to Egyptian king Ptolemy and attributes the contents of the book to the Greek philosopher Pythagoras. Ἀστραμψύχου Αἰγυπτίου πρὸς τὸν βασιλέα Πτολεμαῖον περὶ προρρήσεως διαφόρων ζητημάτων ("From Astrampsychus the Egyptian to king Ptolemy about the prediction of different inquiries"). "This book, an invention of Pythagoras the philosopher, is … a system of prognostication through numbers." It boasts that world conqueror Alexander the Great used this system of prognostication. See also Stewart and Morrell, "Oracles of Astrampsychus," 287–88. On Astrampsychus, see Christine Harrauer, "Astra(m)psychos," Der Neue Pauly vol. 2 (1997): 121–22. PGM VII = P.Lond. I 122, a late antique (4–5th century) papyrus book contains a request for a dream oracle

12–103 with 1030 answers, presented in 103 groups of ten (decads). A table of correspondences stands in between the questions and the answers.[38] The answers were shuffled so that they appear in different order in the text, and the text is interspersed with dummy answers. Instructions in the preface inform the inquirer to select a question and then pick a number from a range of one to ten (this is the randomizing factor). These two numbers are then added.[39] Through the table of correspondences the diviner can locate the number of the answer.[40] The text is preserved in two editions, known as *ecdosis prior* and *ecdosis altera*.[41]

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that features Astrampsychus. Furthermore, there is a Byzantine dreambook attributed to Astramspychus, the Oneirocriticon of Astrampsychus, see Giulio Guidorizzi, *Libro dei sogni / Pseudo-Niceforo; testo critico, introduzione, traduzione e commento a cura di Giulio Guidorizzi*, Koinōnia 5 (Naples: Associazione di studi tardoantichi, 1980); English trans. Steven M. Oberhelman, *Dreambooks in Byzantium: Six Oneirocritica in Translation, with Commentary and Introduction* (Routledge, 2016), ch. 6.

38 As Stewart and Morrell ("Oracles of Astrampsychus," 288) remark: "The ninety-two questions deal with topics of a personal nature – romance, money, travel, health, and job – focusing general upon themes of fortune-telling that remain familiar to us today." For instance: "Will I be successful" (19); "Will I survive the sickness?" (42); "Will I beget children?" (47); "Will I defeat my opponent in the trial?" (63); or "Will I finish what I undertake?" (93).

39 The diviner is instructed: λέγε τὸν ἐρωτῶντα ἵνα λάχῃ καὶ εἴπῃ σοι ἀριθμόν τινα ἀπὸ τοῦ α μέχρι δεκάδος ὃν ἂν ἐθελήσῃ καὶ ὁ θεὸς δῷ αὐτῷ ἐν ἀνοίξει τοῦ στόματος, "tell the questioner to take by lot and to name for you a number between one and ten, whichever he wants and god gives him at the moment he opens his mouth" (trans. Stewart and Morrell, "Oracles of Astramspychus," 291–92). The instructions refer to this number as the questioner's lot (κλῆρος).

40 Some scholars have proposed that this is a 'do-it-yourself' oracle; see Willy Clarysse, "Doe-het-zelf orakels. Van Astrampsychus tot Napoleon," in Katelijn Vandorpe and Herbert Verreth, eds., *Grieken en Romeinen bewegen hemel en aarde: Voorspellen in de Oudheid* (Leuven: Aulos, 1996), 53–70. According to Fridolf Kudlien, the Sortes Astrampsychi can be consulted with a diviner or also by the querent self (*Sklaven-Mentalität im Spiegel antiker Wahrsagerei*, 111). He refers here to Clarysse and Hoogendijk, "De Sortes van Astrampsychus. Een orakelboek uit de Oudheid bewerkt voor het Middelbaar Onderwijs." This is a truly wonderful publication (in Dutch) that presents the Sortes Astrampsychi as school material for learning Greek. Clarysse and Hoogendijk suggest that the pupils can divine with the oracle themselves (ibid., 57–58). However, for the position of the diviner, see Klingshirn, "Inventing the *sortilegus*: Lot Divination and Cultural Identity in Italy, Rome, and the Provinces."

41 These do not equal a pagan and Christianized version. Stewart characterizes the *ecdosis prior* as "a botched attempt to restore a damaged copy of the work, [it] preserves for the most part the phraseology of the archetype, whereas the second edition is more faithful to the structure of the archetype while altering its wording considerably" ("Oracles of Astrampsychus," 287). The *ecdosis prior* is preserved in one thirteenth-century manuscript; the *ecdosis altera* is the best attested, in fragments of 12 papyrus manuscripts

The success and longevity of the Sortes Astrampsychi is apparent in the changes it underwent in its transmission. This was a "living text," a text that could be adapted easily to new situations and in fact had to be adapted to stay relevant. Comparing the different manuscripts shows that users of the Sortes Astrampsychi incorporated numerous updates that made the text more agreeable to a Christian audience.[42] This included adding a prayer addressed to "the Almighty God" at the end of the opening letter and changing questions, especially those with sexual connotations.[43] An appealing example is question 55: "Will I get the woman I desire? (εἰ λαμβάνω ἣν θέλω γυναῖκα)" becomes in a clearly Christianized version: "Will I become a monk?" (εἰ γίνομαι μοναχός).[44] For more on this text, see especially the chapters by Naether, Nasrallah, Ratzan, and Stewart in this book.

5.1.1 Editions

Rudolf Hercher, *Astrampsychi Oraculorum decades CIII* (Berlin: Unger, 1863).

Gerald M. Browne, ed., *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. 1, Ecdosis prior (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1983).

Randall Stewart, ed., *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. 2, Ecdosis altera (Munich and Leipzig: Saur, 2001). Presents a conjectural reconstruction of the archetype (87–127), combining evidence from both the *ecdosis prior* and *ecdosis altera*.

5.1.2 Translation

Randall Stewart and Kenneth Morrell, "Fortune-Telling. Anonymous, The Oracles of Astrampsychus," in *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature*,

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dating from the third through the fifth-sixth century and 11 Medieval manuscripts from the fourteenth through sixteenth century. On the manuscript attestation of the *ecdosis altera*, see Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 2:vii – xii (with number of papyri updated).

42 Stewart ("Oracles of Astrampsychus," 289) observed: "The work quickly became a folkbook. Its true author was unknown or forgotten, its popularity continued, and the text was reworked in smaller and larger ways in the passage of time. An interesting change was the transformation of the work from a pagan to a Christian oracle. The introductory epistle acquired a Christian continuation, including a prayer to the Almighty God … Some questions, especially those of an erotic nature, were transformed into queries of specifically Christian interest, and the corresponding answers were adjusted accordingly."

43 Stewart, "Oracles of Astrampsychus," 289. For a list of changed questions, see Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 2:xiv – xv. "Hae sunt quaestiones pristinae earumque mutatae per interpolationem formae." He charts nine changed questions.

44 Another example is question 66. In supposedly the earliest version: "Will I be reconciled with my girlfriend?" (εἰ καταλλάσσομαι τῇ φίλῃ) was changed it to: "Will I become a bishop?" (εἰ γίνομαι ἐπίσκοπος) and in yet another version to the more widely applicable "Will I become a cleric?" (εἰ γίνομαι κληρικός). Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 2:xiv, and idem, "Oracles of Astrampsychus," 289.

ed. William F. Hansen (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1998), 285–324.

5.1.3 Study

Franziska Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi: Problemlösungsstrategien durch Orakel im römischen Ägypten* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

5.2 *Sortes Barberinianae*

The Sortes Barberinianae is a simplified version of the Sortes Astrampsychi, with 110 questions and 1100 corresponding answers arranged in ten decads.[45] It does not have fake responses, in contrast to the text of the Sortes Astrampsychi, which formed the basis of this text. This text exists in one single copy in a sixteenth-century codex in the Vatican Library, the Codex Barberinianus graecus 13. Randall Stewart is currently preparing an edition of this text and has presented a chapter on the topic in this volume. The text does not have an introduction with operating instructions. Of its 110 questions, sixty are almost identical to those in the Sortes Astrampsychi, but the composer of the Sortes Barberinianae added questions on farming, war and flight, as analyzed by Stewart in this volume.

5.2.1 Edition

Randall Stewart, forthcoming.

5.2.2 Translation

Randall Stewart, forthcoming.

5.2.3 Study

Randall Stewart, "The *Sortes Barberinianae* within the Tradition of Oracular Texts," this volume.

5.3 *Sortes Sangallenses*

A Latin lot text that seems to have taken its inspiration from the Sortes Astrampsychi is the Sortes Sangallenses.[46] Preserved on eighteen folia of a

45 This section draws on Randall Stewart, "The Sortes Barberinianae within the Tradition of Oracular Texts," in this volume.

46 The Sortes Sangallenses resemble the Sortes Astrampsychi by providing concrete answers to specific questions that a client had to select first. It differs from the Greek version by providing dodecads, or lists of twelve answers, instead of the Sortes Astrampsychi's decads. The exact textual relationship between the Sortes Astrampsychi and the Sortes Sangallenses remains unclear. Naether (*Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 284) observes:

once larger codex, the text exists only in fragmentary form in a palimpsest manuscript, Sankt Gallen, Stiftsbibliothek MS 908,[47] after which it is named. Based on paleography and vocabulary, scholars posit that it was copied around the year 600 in southern Gaul. Its date of composition, as Klingshirn shows, falls somewhere after the third century because of numerous Christian elements.[48] Thus this Latin lot text was in use in late antique Gaul for several centuries.[49]

The text consists of answers preceded by numbers ranging from one to twelve per section. The numbering of answers from one to twelve suggests that the mechanism for consulting the text included one throw with two dice or two throws with one die.[50] Just as was the case with the Sortes Astrampsychi, the answers are shuffled.[51]

"Da … weitere Orakelbücher dieser Gattung bekannt sind, ist es nicht statthaft, alle auf einen Archetypus zurückzuführen. Sie entstammen ähnlichen Traditionen, die es zu untersuchen gibt" (see her ch. 5). Naether (ibid.) states: "Allerdings bestehen zwischen Sortes Sangallenses und Sortes Astrampsychi frappierende Ähnlichkeiten in den abgefragten Themen, Antwortzusätzen und der inhaltlichen Struktur, so dass von einer zumindest einseitigen Beeinflussung ausgegangen werden muss." According to Theodore Skeat, the Sortes Sangallenses is modeled on a precursor of the Sortes Astrampsychi. His main argument is that compared to the Greek Sortes Astrampsychi, the answers in the Latin text are unshuffled; a tedious task he thinks no composer would do. As quoted from a private letter in Stewart, "The Textual Transmission of the 'Sortes Astrampsychi,'" 137. Did Skeat perhaps misunderstand Dold's edition with its unshuffled responses? Klingshirn ("Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul," 107) argues that the Sortes Sangallenses "is taken from the Sortes Astrampsychi, partly by translation, partly by adaptation, and partly by free imitation … Other parts may have been taken from equally respectable divinatory texts …"

47 On the manuscript, see Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul," 102–5. Klingshirn provides a table to match the answers from Winnefeld with later decipherings by Dold. The current Sankt Gallen manuscript, also known as the "rex palimpsestorum" is made up of the reused folia of at least 10 different previous codices (Dold, *Die Orakelsprüche im St. Galler Palimpsestcodex 908*, 7).

48 "Recurrent Christian elements in our version indicate that it cannot be dated before the fourth century." (Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul," 105).

49 Certain "legal and administrative details … can be paralleled in epigraphic and legal texts from fifth – and sixth-century Gaul." Klingshirn comments on this that: "While this observation frustrates efforts to establish a precise date, it also suggests that the Sortes Sangallenses could have served as a practical handbook for divination at any time from the late fourth to late sixth centuries. With a text that could easily be altered … the Sortes Sangallenses did not have to fall out of date, and we must assume, was not considered out of date when it was copied for the last time, apparently around 600." (Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul," 105).

50 Dold, *Die Orakelsprüche im St. Galler Palimpsestcodex 908*, 10.

51 "So laufen einerseits die Antworten über den gleichen Gegenstand durch 12 verschiedene Dodekaden, während jede einzelne Dodekade in ihren 12 Sprüchen 12 verschiedene Anliegen behandelt, also beim fortlaufenden Lesen keinen Zusammenhang bietet.

The reuse of the parchment mutilated this *sortes* manuscript in multiple ways: many pages were not incorporated into the new manuscript and thus were lost to us, including the list of questions. Recutting of the pages resulted in the loss of the page or dodecad numbers. In the original manuscript, these numbers allowed the retrieval of responses.[52] The remaining manuscript furthermore lacks an introduction. So the very means by which one could consult the text and retrieve answers are now missing.[53]

The text is important for understanding the social and cultural history of late antique Gaul, as several scholars have shown.[54] But its suitability to the social circumstances of its own time in the end caused the Sortes Sangallenses to become obsolete and irrelevant as times changed. Unlike the Sortes Astrampsychi, this text was not transmitted into the Middle Ages.[55]

Dies konnte den Eindruck des Geheimnisvollen natürlich noch verstärken." Dold, *Die Orakelsprüche im St. Galler Palimpsestcodex 908*, 10–11.

52 The pages of the original manuscript of the *sortes* measured 230 mm x 165 mm with a writing surface of ca. 180 mm x ca. 105 mm. See Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul," 104.

53 "Unlike the Sortes Astrampsychi, the surviving text of the Sortes Sangallenses does not number the dodecads or contain a list of questions, both of which would have been necessary to operate the oracle" (Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul," 103). The preface and concluding sections of the text remain unknown, according to Dold: "Eine große Frage ist lediglich die, wie der eigentliche Anfang und das Ende des Orakelbuches aussah." (*Die Orakelsprüche im St. Galler Palimpsestcodex 908*, 19).

54 For instance, Dold, *Die Orakelsprüche im St. Galler Palimpsestcodex 908*, 13–14: "Es sind … die ewig gleichen Menschlichkeiten, die uns in den Anliegen der Befrager des Orakels begegnen. Leben und Gesundheit … Liebe, Ehe, Familienverhältnisse … Freund und Feind … Hoffnungen und Befürchtungen … Sorge um Heim und Habe … Berufswahl … Unternehmungen verschiedenster Art … Geschäftsverkehr … Prozessieren." Meister writes in the preface to Dold's edition (p. 6): "Was uns in diesem Schriftdenkmal aus dem Ausgang der Antike erschlossen wird, ist die Welt des kleinen Mannes, die Anliegen seines Alltags, seine Sorgen und Wünsche und die Art, wie er diesen auf dem Wege des nie aussterbenden Aberglaubens beizukommen suchte. In diesem Sinne ist die kleine Schrift auch ein kulturhistorisches Dokument …" See also F. C. Burkitt, "Codex Bezae and the 'Sortes Sangallenses'," *JTS* 28 (1927): 58; Strobel, "Soziale Wirklichkeit und irrationales Weltverstehen"; Ernst Schönbauer, "Die Sortes Sangallenses als Erkenntnisquelle des römischen und germanischen Rechts." Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Anzeiger phil.-hist. Kl. 90 (1953): 23–34; Alexander Demandt, "Die Sortes Sangallenses: Eine Quelle zur spätantiken Sozialgeschichte," *Atti dell'Accademia Romanistica Constantiniana* 8 (1990): 635–650; and Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul."

55 "Unlike the Sortes Sanctorum, whose far more general and morally bland responses made it (moderately) popular in succeeding centuries, the Sortes Sangallenses was structurally too peculiar and sharply Roman to survive the transition from late antiquity to the early middle ages. But the features that prevented it from passing out of its cultural world were also the same features that gave it a central place within it.… it remains one of our most useful sources for the problems of everyday life in the fifth and sixth centuries. More

5.3.1 Editions

Hermann Winnefeld, *Sortes Sangallenses Ineditae* (Bonn: Typis Caroli Georgi Univ. Typogr. 1887). Winnefeld's Bonn dissertation.

Hermann Winnefeld, *Sortes Sangallenses. Adiecta sunt alearum oracula ex codice monacensi primum edita*. Bonn: Max Cohen and Sons, 1887. This is a diplomatic edition.

Alban Dold, *Die Orakelsprüche im St. Galler Palimpsestcodex 908* (*die sogenannten "Sortes Sangallenses"*). Vol. 225/4. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasses. Sitzungsberichte (Vienna: Rudolf M. Rohrer, 1948). Dold improved a large number of Winnefeld's readings, but did not produce an edition in the strict sense. Rather, he organized the answers thematically, as if by questions, thus basically unshuffling the manuscript. This produces an interesting overview of the topics addressed in the questions and thus the life situations of those imagined to consult the oracle.

Richard Meister, *Die Orakelsprüche im St. Galler Palimpsestcodex 908* (*die sogenannten "Sortes Sangallenses"*). *Erläuterungen*. Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasses. Sitzungsberichte (Vienna: Rudolf M. Rohrer, 1951). A supplement to Dold's edition, with a detailed analysis of orthography and grammar as well as a list of corrections.

5.3.2 Translation

None.

5.3.3 Study

William E. Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul: The *Sortes Sangallenses*," in *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, ed. Sarah Johnston and Peter Struck (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 99–128.

5.4 *Sortes Duodecim Patriarcharum*

The Sortes Duodecim Patriarcharum is a medieval Latin book of fate composed in rhyme: *Si vis prodesse sortes anathema nec esse* ("If you want to benefit, lots are not anathema").[56] The text is first attested in twelfth-century

than that, it offers us a view of the diviner's world from the inside that, with a bit of imagination, can be connected to the world outside …" (Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul," 117).

56 Theodore C. Skeat, "An Early Mediaeval 'Book of Fate'," 42. The title is a modern scholarly one, as Skeat (ibid., 47–48) notes: "it appears that both the title and the association of the individual patriarchs with the 12 questions and 12 dodecads is a later development." The names of the patriarchs "first appear attached to the dodecads in MSS. B and D."

manuscripts and was composed, according to Skeat, in the second half of the eleventh century.[57] It thereby falls outside the chronological scope of this book. Nevertheless, a short discussion is appropriate here because of its similarities with the Sortes Sangallenses, as an attestation of its afterlife.[58] The Sortes Duodecim Patriarcharum may even be loosely described as a rhyming and simplified version of the Sortes Sangallenses.[59]

The text consists of a brief prologue with instructions, including for fasting and praying the Credo and Lord's Prayer, and a list of twelve questions. This is followed by 144 answers that are specific to the questions. They are presented in twelve groups of twelve (dodecads) and, again, staggered; this enhanced the mysterious character of the text.[60]

57 Skeat ("An Early Mediaeval 'Book of Fate'," 41–42) gives a list of manuscripts that contain this text. The text of Mss. B and C is given in A. Boutemy, "Notice sur le recueil poétique du manuscrit Cotton Vitellius A xii du British Museum," *Latomus* 1 (1937), sections v–vi. On the date, see Skeat, "An Early Mediaeval 'Book of Fate'," 50.

58 Skeat observes that although most Medieval lot texts are dependent upon Arabic texts, in the case of the Sortes xii Patriarcharum, there is a "complete absence of any sign of Arabic influence" ("An Early Mediaeval 'Book of Fate'," 50). Skeat rather sees influence from the Sortes Sangallenses. He therefore considers it possible "that the Sortes xii Patriarcharum is a link in the chain of popular tradition, which, though many intermediate stages are now hidden from us, connects a scrap of a Greek papyrus from Oxyrhynchus … with the St. Albans of Matthew Paris" (ibid., 51).

59 Skeat ("An Early Mediaeval 'Book of Fate'," 48) writes: "The resemblance to the Sortes Sangallenses is especially close, for although that system was much more extensive, the number of questions being not less than 126, each question had twelve alternative answers, and the answers were arranged in dodecads and were 'staggered' in exactly the same way as in the 'Sortes xii Patriarcharum'. By contrast, in most mediaeval Books of Fate the groups of answers are regularly distinguished by the names of various so-called 'Judges', Kings, Planets, Constellations, Birds, and so on." See also Allegra Iafrate, "'Si sequeris casum, casus frangit tibi nasum': la raccolta delle sorti del ms Ashmole 304," *Aevum* 85 (2011): 471.

60 One manuscript has a diagram that accompanied the text; another manuscript has miniature images. A circular diagram in one of the manuscripts referring to Pythagoras (*Pythagorae effigies*) reminds of the Sortes Astrampsychi. The diagram and reference to Pythagoras are in Skeat's Ms H. Presumably its Vorlage, Ms. F, had a similar diagram, now lost. See Skeat, "An Early Mediaeval 'Book of Fate'," 42. Benedek Láng, *Unlocked Books: Manuscripts of Learned Magic in the Medieval Libraries of Central Europe* (Penn State University Press, 2010), 130, states: "Pythagoras was famous for the numerological nature of his philosophy, and the theory that numbers … might correspond to aspect of reality appeared as a residue of the Pythagorean worldview." Medieval divinatory manuscripts often include a Sphera Pythagorae (Sphere of Pythagoras), ibid., 130–31.

Strikingly, the Sortes Duodecim Patriarcharum features numerous answers that denounce the use of the oracle.[61] As Skeat noted, these cleverly served a double function: On the one hand, they form a kind of built-in safeguard against ecclesiastical disapproval. On the other hand, they are dummy answers for the number one, which can never be reached with two dice throws. As also with the dummy answers in the Sortes Astrampsychi and Sortes Sangallenses, the inquirer would never receive these answers. Thus a reviewer of the text who had hesitations against divination would find multiple denunciations in it but the inquirer herself would never come across such denouncement, thus ensuring that she could use it without shame.[62]

5.4.1 Edition

A critical edition is still lacking. The text of two manuscripts (Skeat's B and C) can be found in A. Boutemy, "Notice sur le recueil poétique du manuscrit Cotton Vitellius A xii du British Museum," *Latomus* 1 (1937): 278–313, at 299–303.

5.4.2 Translation

None.

5.4.3 Studies

Theodore C. Skeat, "An Early Mediaeval 'Book of Fate': The Sortes XII Patriarcharum: With a Note on 'Books of Fate' in General," *Mediaeval and Renaissance Studies* 3 (1954): 41–54.

Allegra Iafrate, "'Si sequeris casum, casus frangit tibi nasum': La raccolta delle sorti del Ms Ashmole 304," *Aevum* 85 (2011): 457–88.

6 Group 2: Sortes with General Answers

These *sortes* do not work with a fixed list of questions and matching answers, unlike the texts in group 1; rather, the inquirer can bring any question. In order to be applicable to basically every question, the answers are deliberately general, at times even ambiguous, and require interpretation towards the situation of the

61 What Skeat ("An Early Mediaeval 'Book of Fate'," 47) characterizes as "virulent denunciations of fortune-telling." For example: *Velle Dei nosse Casu non est tibi posse; Cui Casus Dux est, sibi nunquam previa lux est. Vergit ad occasum qui ponit spem sibi Casum … Si sequeris Casum, Casus frangit tibi nasum* (ibid.).

62 Skeat, "An Early Mediaeval 'Book of Fate'," 47. That these negative answers could not be reached, of course, would not be apparent to either a client or an ecclesiastical censor.

inquirer.[63] The selection of lots in this category was done mainly by throws of dice, either four-sided knucklebones, also called *astragaloi*, or six-sided dice.[64]

6.1 *Sortes Alearum*

The most complete Greek example of this type of oracle is the so-called Sortes Alearum (from the Latin *alea*, die) or *astragoloi*-oracles. The textual evidence consists of a corpus of twenty-one at times fragmentary inscriptions dating from the second and third centuries CE.[65] All were found in a geographically confined region: the cities and towns in Southern Phrygia, Cilicia, and Pisidia (southwestern Anatolia).[66]

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63 Already Johannes Bolte recognized that the answers had to be used in every situation but finds such general answers monotonous: "Da die Verse oft verschiedene Anliegen und Lebenslagen passen müssen, ist ihr Inhalt ziemlich eintönig." Bolte, "Zur Geschichte der Punktier – und Losbücher," in *Jahrbuch für historische Volkskunde*, vol. 1: *Volkskunde und ihre Grenzgebiete*, ed. Wilhelm Fraenger (Berlin: Herbert Stubenrauch, 1925), 192.

64 *Astragoloi* are knucklebones of sheep. They have four sides, which are counted as 1, 3, 4 and 6. See the useful discussions by Graf, "Rolling the Dice for an Answer," 60–62; Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 7–10 (with images of knuckle-bones), and Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 320–22. On the preference for dice because of their demoniacal quality ("eine gewisse dämonische Macht"), see Bolte, "Zur Geschichte der Punktier – und Losbücher," 192.

65 It remains unknown how long these dice oracle inscriptions remained in use. Decay or wear and tear of the material as is the case with manuscripts on papyrus or parchment was not a decisive issue. Eventually, it seems that the stone as text carrier for *sortes* was discontinued in late antiquity. While its advantages were durability and suitability for monumentality and public display, its downside, in addition to expense, was obviously its static nature, its lack of portability, something that seems to have mattered with the manuscripts. See also in this volume, Introduction, 21–22.

66 See also the map in Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 23. A slightly earlier (second half of the first/early second century) oracle inscription has turned up in Bulgaria, the Roman province of Thrace. It features a different lot text, that also was consulted with the help of dice. These inscriptions differ from each other per region: the ones from Asia Minor are (predominantly) phrased in dactylic hexameters, the one from Thrace/Bulgaria in iambic trimeters. See Kalinka, *Antike Denkmäler in Bulgarien*, 146–47, no. 162: "Sofia Museum Marmorplatte … Fragment eines Fünfastragalen-Orakels in iambischen Trimetern." For the date, second half of the first century/early second, see ibid., 147. From their mis-en page on the stone, Kalinka (ibid., 147) argues that at one point these inscriptions were copied from wooden tablets written in three columns. See also Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 25. Furthermore, oracle inscriptions are not known from other regions in the empire so far. Since they required large stones, it is possible that those have been reused over time in other regions and thus disappeared. Graf ("Rolling the Dice for an Answer," 54) points out that many of blocks with the Anatolian oracles had been reused, and also more generally that "[b]eautiful blocks all over the Mediterranean invited later inhabitants to reuse and recut them – in our case, surprisingly enough, at least two of the blocks are preserved more or less in their entirety." However, it seems more likely that the

The texts of these inscriptions can be divided into three groups, based on the number of throws with *astragoloi*: seven throws, five throws, and another, different text also based on five throws.[67] The largest group, 17 of the 21 inscriptions, has 56 answers with small variations in wording. Selection was reached by throwing five *astragoloi*.[68] The first line of each answer gives the dice throws, followed by the sum of the throw, and the name of a deity in the genitive, such as Zeus Olympius, Athena Areia, etc.[69] Then follows an answer in four lines of dactylic hexameters.[70] According to Johannes Nollé, some of these texts show a reaction to the spread of Christianity in the area, for instance in the use of the imperative.[71]

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dice oracle inscriptions were a regional phenomenon, just as the Egyptian preference of distributing *sortes* in miniature codices. Probably, as Graf (ibid., 77) argues, the situation in Asia Minor was the result of competition and imitation among provincial cities: "once the inventive *agoronomos* of one particular town – whichever it was – had set up such a gadget on its agora and the users liked it, all the major neighboring cities took up the idea, and it became something you just had to have. In this reading, the quasi-identify of the texts suggests one local inventor whom all the others, with two exceptions, just imitated."

67 Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 20–21. As Graf ("Rolling the Dice for an Answer," 58) states: "All texts agree in their structure and in the underlying basic method of consultation, and they are all composed of a sequence of oracles in a typical and standardized structure."

68 For an explanation of the oracle system, see Graf, "Rolling the Dice for an Answer," 58–66.

69 This indicates either "the throw of a given divinity" or "the oracle of a given divinity," Graf, "Rolling the Dice for an Answer," 63.

70 For instance: "1 1 1 1 3 7 of Athena Areia. If four Chians and one three are cast, the god signals: By avoiding enmity and animosity, you will reach your prize; you will arrive and the blue-eyed goddess Athena will save you. The activity that you have in mind will turn out as you wish it." Graf, "Rolling the Dice for an Answer," 84, Appendix B.

71 For Nollé, the use of imperative in the oracle inscriptions, the so-called Sortes Alearum, from Asia Minor mirrors Christian discourse. He states (*Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 291–92): "Es ist dabei kein Zufall, daß die Orakeldichter sich auch jener Mittel bedienten, die sie bei der zu bekämpfenden Religion fanden, wie etwa die leichte Verständlichkeit der Texte, die Vorstellungen vom guten und Gutes stiftenden Gott, die Bekämpfung der Ängste." Nollé discusses the influence of Jewish and Christian thought on the pagan oracles as competition and mutual influence. He rightly notices that the other way, namely, the Christianization of pagan texts and practices, is well-researched: "Zu diesen Inspirationen des von der christlichen Bewegung beeinflußten Zeitgeistes gehört auch der imperative Zug, der sich durch die behandelten Chresmologien zieht. Göttlich autorisierte Gebote und Vorschriften waren typisch für Christentum und Judentum, der Religiösität von Griechen und Römern aber weitgehend fremd" (ibid., 292). "Durch Chresmologien oder ein dichtes Netz theologischer Orakel, wie es etwa in Klaros geknüpft wurde, beschritt die heidnische Religion einen Weg, der zur Offenbarungsreligion führte. Insofern ist die Belebung der Orakeltätigkeit in der Hohen Kaiserzeit nicht eine Wiederherstellung der alten Geltung, die Orakel einst hatten, sondern in gewisser Weise auch eine neue Entwicklung, die die Orakel von der Entscheidungshilfe in bestimmten Situationen zu einer viel allgemeineren und umfassenderen Lebenshilfe werden ließen" (ibid.). At oracle

Most of the surviving oracle inscriptions from Asia Minor were free-standing monuments: monolithic, rectangular pillars with the answers, commonly 56, inscribed on the sides with a statue of the god Hermes on top.[72] Others, chiseled into large slabs of marble, were put up inside buildings.[73] Judging from the material and the quality of the epigraphy, these were costly monuments. As Fritz Graf concludes, the fact that these durable, expensive inscriptions were erected in public places indicates their prominence in the communities that erected them and also the people that used them.[74] The placement of these oracles suggests furthermore that they were intended to be consulted by those who frequent market places, including merchants and traders, which also explains the emphasis on commerce in the answers.[75]

6.1.1 Edition

Johannes Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel: Astragal – und Alphabetchresmologien der hochkaiserzeitlichen Orakelrenaissance*. Vestigia 57. München: C.H. Beck, 2007. Presents new critical editions of the inscriptions and commentary.

6.1.2 Translations

English: G. H. R. Horsley and Stephen Mitchell, eds., *The Inscriptions of Central Pisidia: Including Texts from Kremna, Ariassos, Keraia, Hyia, Panemoteichos, the Sanctuary of Apollo of the Perminoundeis, Sia, Kocaaliler, and the Döşeme Boğazı*, Inschriften griechischer Städte aus Kleinasien 57 (Bonn: R. Habelt, 2000).

Fritz Graf, "Rolling the Dice for an Answer," in Johnston and Struck, *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, 51–97. Translation of the main oracle at 84–94, Appendix B.

German: Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*.

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31 line 4 (ἐπ᾽ἐλπίδος ἴσθι), Nollé (ibid., 157) comments that hoping on God is a central to the Christian faith. The question of the potential impact of Christian discourse on the dice oracles needs further research.

72 Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 25. See also the description of these monuments and their discoveries in Graf, "Rolling the Dice for an Answer," 53–58.

73 Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 26.

74 See also Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 26–27: "Durch die dauerhafte Positionierung an wichtigen, wenn nicht gar zentralen öffentlichen Plätzen einer Stadt bzw. eines Dorfes wurden derartige Chresmologien zu einem unübersehbaren Phänomen der öffentlichen Religiosität – nicht etwa privater arkaner Magie – und damit zu einem Teil der städtischen Identität, die auch in der Kaiserzeit noch in weitem Umfang religiös determiniert war."

75 Graf, "Rolling the Dice for an Answer," 76–77.

6.1.3 Studies
Graf, "Rolling the Dice for an Answer."
Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel.*

Two recently published sets of texts with similarities to the Sortes Alearum also belong in this group of *sortes* with general answers: the Dios Oracle Ostraca edited by Hélène Cuvigny, and the Kellis Oracle Book edited by Francisca Hoogendijk. Both texts have a detailed archaeological provenance that informs their use.

6.2 *Ostraca from the Shrine of the Praesidium at Dios*

The former, from the Roman fortress of Dios in the Eastern Egyptian Desert, consists of ostraca and pieces of steatite (local stone) inscribed in Greek with oracular answers similar to the Sortes Alearum.[76] They were found in a shrine dedicated to Zeus Helios Megas Sarapis at the Roman *praesidium*[77] and are dated to around the year 200. The oracles are numbered (numbers between 2 and 26 are preserved) and mention the name of a deity in the first line. They probably had instructions for the day of consultation. The fortress is located on the route to the Red Sea port of Berenice, an important trade route, and answers cater particularly to travelers.

6.2.1 Edition, Translation, and Study
Hélène Cuvigny, "The Shrine in the Praesidium of Dios (Eastern Desert of Egypt): Graffiti and Oracles in Context." *Chiron* 40 (2010): 245–99.

6.3 *Kellis Oracle Book*

A page from a papyrus codex from Kellis in the Dakhleh Oasis in Egypt's Western Desert has numbered oracles in Greek. Preserved are oracles 19 to 29. The answers resemble those of the *astragoloi*-oracles from Asia Minor and the oracle ostraca from the *praesidium* at Dios. Found in a house near the temple for the god Tutu, the papyrus may have belonged to a priest of the cult who also consulted in astrology.[78] The oracle mentions both Egyptian and Greek

76 They may have been written on ostraca and stone because of lack of papyrus, or perhaps because they were drafts, see Hélène Cuvigny, "The Shrine in the Praesidium of Dios (Eastern Desert of Egypt): Graffiti and Oracles in Context," *Chiron* 40 (2010): 258.

77 As Cuvigny ("The Shrine in the Praesidium of Dios," 280) concludes: "In Dios, a team of χρησμολόγοι was allowed to officiate in a chapel of Zeus Helios Megas Sarapis, using a textual tradition better witnessed outside Egypt and especially designed for travellers."

78 Francisca A. J. Hoogendijk, "Page of an Oracle Book: Papyrus Kellis 96.150," in *Proceedings of the 27th International Congress of Papyrology*, ed. Tomasz Derda et al., Journal of Juristic Papyrology, Supplement XXVIII (Warsaw: Journal of Juristic Papyrology, 2016), 595–622. A

deities.[79] The system for consulting it remains unclear but perhaps involved throwing seven *astragoloi*.

6.3.1 Edition, Translation, and Study

Francisca A. J. Hoogendijk, "Page of an Oracle Book: Papyrus Kellis 96.150," in *Proceedings of the 27th International Congress of Papyrology*, ed. Tomasz Derda et al., Journal of Juristic Papyrology. Supplement XXVIII (Warsaw: Journal of Juristic Papyrology, 2016), 595–622.

6.4 *Italian Lot Oracles*

Like the Sortes Alearum, the heterogeneous texts known as Italian lot oracles also survive in the form of inscriptions. Dating between the middle and the end of the first millennium BCE, they are inscribed on small objects made of bronze, lead, and stone and written in Latin, Etruscan, and other Italic languages. A total of about 30 responses, not all complete, are known. The largest group, the so-called Bahareno *sortes*, was discovered in the sixteenth century on seventeen bronze strips, of which three now survive, two in Florence and one in Paris. Twelve mostly fragmentary responses comprise the next largest group. Found in the mid-nineteenth century in Fornovo (Forum Novum) and now kept in Parma, they are inscribed on the long sides of three square bronze bars. A few other responses are known from individual objects; how many there are depends on whether the objects that contain them can be classified as *sortes*.

6.4.1 Edition

Inscriptiones Latinae liberae rei publicae, ed. Attilio Degrassi, vol. 2 (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1963), nos. 1070–1087a.

6.4.2 Translation

Remains of Old Latin, vol. 4: *Archaic Inscriptions*, trans. E. H. Warmington, LCL (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1940), 246–51.

Coptic amulet against a snakebite was found in the same room; in the adjacent room were five horoscopes, some in handwriting resembling that of the oracle book. Hoogendijk (ibid., 600) concludes: "it may not be far-fetched to assume that this same astrologer also dealt out oracle answers, and copied the oracle book of which the following papyrus formed a page."

79 According to Hoogendijk (ibid., 621), "(o)ne gets the impression that the person who composed this version of the oracle book copied oracles from different sources, which may or may not have originated inside Egypt. The specialist Greek oracular language and Greek gods were combined with Egyptian elements to serve the local population."

6.4.3 Studies

Laura Buchholz, "Identifying the Oracular sortes of Italy," in Mika Kajava (ed.), *Studies in Ancient Oracles and Divination* (Rome: Institutum Romanum Finlandiae, 2013), 111–44.

Giovanna Bagnasco Gianni, "Le *sortes* etrusche," in *Sorteggio pubblico e cleromanzia dall'Antichità all'età moderna*, ed. Federica Cordano and Cristiano Grottanelli (Milan: ET, 2001), 197–220.

Cristiano Grottanelli, "*Sorte unica pro casibus pluribus enotata*: Literary Texts and Lot Inscriptions as Sources for Ancient Kleromancy," in *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter T. Struck (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2005), 129–146, esp. 138–41.

6.5 *Sortes Sanctorum* (*Also Known as Sortes Apostolorum*)

More complete than the Italian lot oracles, the Sortes Sanctorum is a dice text with general answers.[80] A fragmentary fourth- or fifth-century Greek papyrus, recently published by Kevin Wilkinson, attests for the first time the Greek version of this text.[81] Wilkinson reconstructs the development and trajectory for the Sortes Sanctorum in five phases: (1) A pagan Greek version may have preceded (2) the lightly Christianized Greek fragment. This version consisted probably of 216 answers, based on three separate throws of a die in order.[82] (3) At one point, the text was shortened to 56 *sortes*, operated with three dice, not taking into account the order of the throws. Perhaps this coincided with (4) a rather faithful Latin translation. This must have taken place before the first – unfavorable – mention of the text in the West at the Council of Vannes, Gaul, in the mid-fifth century (462–468).[83] (5) In the transmission of this Latin

80 The phrase *sortes sanctorum* goes back to the Vulgate of Col 1:12 τοῦ κλήρου τῶν ἁγίων. See William E. Klingshirn, "Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*: Gibbon, Du Cange, and Early Christian Lot Divination," *JECS* 10.1 (2002): 82, with reference to Ernst von Dobschütz. For similarities between the Sortes Alearum from Asia Minor and the Sortes Sanctorum, see Graf, "Rolling the Dice for an Answer," 78–82, section V.

81 Kevin W. Wilkinson, "A Greek Ancestor of the *Sortes Sanctorum*," *ZPE* 196 (2015): 94–102. The papyrus is a bifolium from a miniature codex that belongs to the Beinecke collection at Yale University. Its text allowed Wilkinson to prove the scholarly assumption that the Latin text of the Sortes Sanctorum was translated from the Greek (ibid., 99).

82 For a fuller explanation, see Wilkinson, "A Greek Ancestor of the *Sortes Sanctorum*," 101–2.

83 See Klingshirn, "Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*," 84–85. The canon reads: (1) *Ac ne id fortasse uideatur omissum* (2) *quod maxime fidem catholicae religionis infestat,* (3) *quod aliquanti clerici student auguriis* (4) *et sub nomine confictae religionis* (5) *quas sanctorum sortes uocant,* (6) *diuinationis scientiam profitentur* (7) *aut quarumcumque scripturarum inspectione* (8) *futura promittunt* (9) *hoc quicumque clericus detectus fuerit uel consulere docere* (10) *ab ecclesia habeatur extraneus.* "(1) We should not perhaps appear to have omitted something (2) that especially injures belief in the catholic religion. (3) Some

translation, theologically heterodox aspects were adapted to render the text more acceptable.[84]

The complete text of these Sortes Sanctorum is preserved in Latin manuscripts from the early ninth century and beyond.[85] But the negative comment about the text from the Gallic bishops at Vannes in the mid-fifth century indicates that the Latin translation already circulated at that time in Gaul.[86] The text opens with the words: *Post solem surgunt stellae* ("After the sun the stars come out") and consists of 56 responses selected by throwing three dice, irrespective of order (numbered 6–6–6, 6–6–5, … 1–1–1). By the thirteenth century, the work was known as the Sortes Apostolorum.[87]

6.5.1 Editions

James Rendel Harris, *The Annotators of the Codex Bezae* (*with Some Notes on Sortes Sanctorum*) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901), Appendix B: The Latin and Provençal System of Sortes, 117–27. Latin text reprinted from the edition of Pierre Pithou (1687). Provençal translation of the late thirteenth/early fourteenth century (Paris, BnF nouv. acq. fr. 4227) published by

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clergy are devoted to auguries (4) and under the label of what pretends to be religion – (5) what they call saints' lots – (6) they profess a knowledge of divination, (7) or by looking into any kind of writings whatever (8) predict future events. (9) Any cleric found either to have been a client or a practitioner of this (10) should be considered estranged from the church."

84 Wilkinson, "A Greek Ancestor of the *Sortes Sanctorum*," with summary on p. 102. Based on comparison with the one preserved overlapping *sors* in Greek, Wilkinson (ibid., 100) also showed that the Latin translation preserved in later manuscripts had tendency towards orthodoxy compared to this earlier Greek text. The Latin text as we have it now is thus two steps removed from the Greek, there having been "a more primitive Latin translation that has not survived and that offered … a more faithful translation."

85 Until recently many different Christian lot texts and biblical lot divination were called Sortes Sanctorum, but, as Klingshirn has shown, Sortes Sanctorum is the title of one specific text and not lot divination in general: "between the fifth and eleventh centuries, *sortes sanctorum* referred neither to biblical lot divination nor to any *genre* of divination at all; rather, like Sortes Apostolorum, it served as the title of a specific text, extant in manuscripts of the ninth through sixteenth centuries." (Klingshirn, "Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*," 81). It was also translated in Provençal and old French.

86 Klingshirn ("Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*," esp. 124) greatly nuances the prohibitions against divination and shows that canons restrict specific forms of divination in specific instances by specific persons.

87 See Klingshirn, "Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*," 81 and 98–104. As he (ibid., 90) notes, this title (Liber qui appelatur Sortes apostolorum) occurs also in the Decretum Gelasianum (early sixth century). But "until the twelfth century, the work was … known only as Sortes Sanctorum" (ibid., 93). It is not clear whether this originally referred to the same work. Syriac authors and manuscripts also know a work under this title (ibid., 101).

Félix Rocquain, "Les sorts des saints ou des apôtres," *Bibliothèque de l'École des chartes* 41 (1880): 457–74.

Enrique Montero Cartelle, *Les* Sortes sanctorum: *Étude, édition critique et traduction* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013). First published in Spanish as Enrique Montero Cartelle and Alberto Alonso Guardo, *Los "Libros de Suertes" medievales: Las "Sortes Sanctorum" y los "Prenostica Socratis Basilei", Estudio, traducción y edición crítica* (Madrid: Conseuo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2004).

Kevin W. Wilkinson, "A Greek Ancestor of the *Sortes Sanctorum*," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 196 (2015): 94–102. Edition of P.CtYBR inv. 4640.

6.5.2 Translations

Spanish: Montero Cartelle, *Los "Libros de Suertes" medievales*, 70–95.

French: Montero Cartelle, *Les* Sortes sanctorum, 70–105.

6.5.3 Study

William E. Klingshirn, "Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*: Gibbon, Du Cange, and Early Christian Lot Divination," *Journal of Early Christian Studies* 10.1 (2002): 77–130.

6.6 *Sortes Monacenses*

This complex text is found in a manuscript dating to the end of the ninth or beginning of the tenth century (Munich, Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, Clm 14846, fols. 106v–121v). The manual, missing its beginning and end but otherwise apparently complete, consists of two separate systems of *sortes* that have been blended, with a certain logic despite copyist mistakes, into a continuous text. The first system, edited by Hermann Winnefeld in 1887, consists of a series of responses (now 51, originally 56) similar to those of the Sortes Sanctorum. Each response is marked by a sequence of three numbers between 1 and 6. These are arranged in descending order from 6–6–5 (6–6–6 is missing) to 2–2–1 (with 2–1–1, 1–1–1, as well as 5–5–3 and 3–2–1 also missing). Many of these number combinations are preceded or in some cases followed by letters of the alphabet. The second system, edited by the Celticist Rudolf Thurneysen in 1885, also uses letters of the alphabet, but combines these with the signs of the zodiac and days of the lunar month. Responses organized in this way, not related at all to the Sortes Sanctorum but rather in some cases with Irish and British glosses, have been inserted after each group of numbered responses, that is, after 6–6–1, 6–5–1, 6–4–1, and so on. It is unclear exactly how the lot manual operated, but it seems to have involved both the rolling of dice and the selection of letters in one or another part of the page of a book.

A reference to the Psalter (fol. 107v) suggests that this and other biblical books might have been used for the purpose.

6.6.1 Editions

Rudolf Thurneysen, "Altirische und brittische Wörter in einer Sortes-Sammlung der Münchener Bibliothek," *Sitzungsberichte der philosophisch-philologischen und historischen Classe der Königlich Bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften zu München* 1885 (Munich, 1886): 90–112.

Hermann Winnefeld, *Sortes Sangallenses. Adiecta sunt alearum oracula ex codice monacensi primum edita* (Bonn: Max Cohen and Sons, 1887), 53–60.

James Rendel Harris, *The Annotators of the Codex Bezae* (*with Some Notes on Sortes Sanctorum*) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901), Appendix E: The Munich Sortes Alearum, 180–84. Reprinted from Winnefeld (1887).

Enrique Montero Cartelle, *Les* Sortes sanctorum: *Étude, édition critique et traduction* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013), Appendix IV, 125–31, reprinted from Harris.

6.6.2 Image

A digitized copy of the manuscript can be found at https://opacplus.bsb-muenchen.de/metaopac/singleHit.do?methodToCall=showHit&curPos=1&identifier=100_SOLR_SERVER_1536780779.

6.6.3 Translation

None.

6.6.4 Study

Jacqueline Champeaux, "'Sorts' antiques et médiévaux: les lettres et les chiffres," in *Au miroir de la culture antique: Mélanges offerts au Président René Marache*, 67–89 (Rennes: Presses universitaires de Rennes, 1992).

6.7 *The Vatican Coptic Lot Book* (*P.Vat.Copt. 1*)

A lacunose Coptic manuscript in the Vatican Library (P.Vat. Copt. 1), written in clear and professional handwriting, has short, numbered answers.[88] Preserved are answers 21–72 and 153–218. Between the answers, the scribe drew an

88 The manuscript is very fragmentary: at least two folia are missing at the beginning and Van Lantschoot assumes that even more pages may have preceded what is left here, including sections with prayers. Furthermore, sections in the middle and at the end are lost. The pages itself are also damaged. See Arnold van Lantschoot, "Une collection sahidique de 'Sortes Sanctorum,'" *Le Muséon* 69 (1956): 38.

ornamental line consisting of three short strokes with dots in between, thus visually separating the answers.[89] The numbers suggest that the text was operated through dice but the exact mechanism is not clear. Since the numbers exceed 216, the text must have operated with more than three dice throws ($6 \times 6 \times 6 = 216$) or another retrieval system.

The text was edited by Arnold van Lantschoot in 1956 and has since received insufficient scholarly attention.[90] Hopefully that changes with the recent availability of the images online.

6.7.1 Edition

Arnold van Lantschoot, "Une collection sahidique de 'Sortes Sanctorum.'" *Le Muséon* 69 (1956): 35–52.

6.7.2 Images

http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Pap.Vat.copt.1

6.7.3 Translation

French: Van Lantschoot (1956). English: Marvin W. Meyer and Richard Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 251–6.

6.7.4 Study

None.

6.8 *Rhiktologia*

A fourth- or fifth-century Greek papyrus fragment, PSI XVII Congr. 5, forms the earliest attestation of what in later manuscript is called *rhiktologion*.[91] The Greek fragment is the ancestor, perhaps in a different recension, of Byzantine

89 On the ornamental line, see also Van Lantschoot, "Une collection sahidique de 'Sortes Sanctorum'," 36. A similar division can also be seen in the Harvard Codex with the Gospel of the Lots of Mary (where it has no apparent function since the answers are already distinct on opened pages). See Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?* 44.

90 With the exception of Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*.

91 It is PSI inv. 152. In his *editio princeps*, Mario Naldini entitled the fragment "*Kephalaia* christiani," taking a cue from the repeated κεφάλαιον at the end of sections in the text itself. Published in: *Trenta testi greci da papiri letterari e documentari: editi in occasione del XVII Congresso internazionale di papirologia, Napoli, 19–26 maggio 1983*, ed. Manfredo Manfredi (Florence: Istituto papirologico "G. Vitelli," 1983), 12–15. The fragment was republished by Paul Canart and Rosario Pintaudi, who identified it as part of a system of Christian oracles: "PSI XVII Congr. 5: Un système d'oracles chrétiens ('Sortes Sanctorum')," *ZPE* (1984): 85–90.

and later Greek manuscripts with the title *Rhiktologion* (ῥικτολόγιον ἐκ τῶν τοῦ ἁγίου εὐαγγελίου κεφαλαίων).[92]

The fragmentary papyrus, measuring 8.5 x 15.3 cm., has writing on both sides and probably constituted a page of a codex. It preserves four answers, each beginning with two numbers and a *chi-rho* sign. The first number series is 69–72 (ξθ, [ο], οᾳ, οβ); the second number indicates the throw of two dice: 3 3, 3 4; 3 [5?]; [3 6?]. The relation between the numbers remains unclear. Then follow six or seven short lines of text. According to Canart, these *sortes* combine Sortes Ioannenses or *hermēneiai* with general oracle responses.[93] Several answers close by stating: "the gist is clear."

6.8.1 Edition

Paul Canart and Rosario Pintaudi, "PSI XVII Congr. 5: Un système d'oracles chrétiens ('Sortes sanctorum')," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 57 (1984): 85–90.

6.8.2 Images

http://www.psi-online.it/documents/psi-congrxvii-5

6.8.3 Translation

None.

6.8.4 Study

None.

6.9 *Gospel of the Lots of Mary*

With its longer, general answers, the Gospel of the Lots of Mary bears resemblance to the *rhiktologia*. The text is attested in Coptic in four distinct copies, all of which belonged to miniature manuscripts. The fullest is a sixth-century miniature codex; three additional fragments preserve sections of this

92 Canart and Pintaudi recognized the parallels between the PSI fragment and the Greek *rhiktologia*, especially manuscripts in the Bibliothèque National in Paris: BN gr.2510, ff.88–96v, BN gr. 2243, ff.643–647, BN gr. 2091, ff.1v–6v, and also Bodl.Barocc. 111, ff.205v–211. According to Canart ("PSI XVII Congr. 5," 88), the textual similarities and overlaps between the *sortes* in PSI XVII Congr. 5 and those in the *rhiktologia* are so numerous that they must have a common ancestor even if perhaps the papyrus presents a different recension. He concludes that the *rhiktologion* is the reappearance, some nine or ten centuries later, of *sortes* in use in the proto byzantine period. The word ῥικτολόγιον is derived from the verb ῥίχνω, 'to throw' (LBG), see also ῥίπτω (LSJ); τὰ ῥιπτά means dice (LBG).

93 Canart, "PSI XVII Congr. 5," 86–87.

text, two of them are presented for the first time in this volume by Alex Kocar.[94] Based on similarities with the Greek of the PSI fragment and other *rhiktologia* (see above), the Gospel of the Lots of Mary may have been freely translated from a Greek text and stem from as early as the second half of the fourth century.[95] The text also shares phrases and expressions with other Coptic *sortes*, notably the Vatican Coptic Lot Book (P.Vat.Copt. 1, see above) and a ten-page section of a miniature parchment codex in Middle Egyptian dialect, that Wolf-Peter Funk will publish.[96]

In its most complete form, the Gospel of the Lots of Mary has 37 responses. The *incipit* attributes the text to Mary, the mother of Jesus through interaction with the archangel Gabriel. Although this section refers explicitly to lots (ⲕⲗⲏⲣⲟⲥ), it lacks concrete instructions for the consultation of the oracle. It is possible that this happened through bibliomancy, opening the book at random, but other forms of consultation such as counting a number in one's head or using dice cannot be excluded. The text is lightly Christianized, with emphasis on God rather than Jesus Christ.

A recently published page from another sixth-century miniature codex contains what may be a hybrid text, a combination of a *sortes* text such as the Gospel of the Lots of Mary with the Apophthegmata Patrum.[97] As its editor Sofía Toralles Tovar shows, this fragment is written in a very similar hand to that of the codex with the Gospel of the Lots of Mary and both manuscripts probably came from the Monastery of Apa Apollo in Bawit, possibly confirming that these *sortes* were employed in a monastic environment.[98]

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94 In addition to the new fragments presented in this volume by Kocar, see also Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?*; and Lucia Papini and David Frankfurter, "Fragments of the Sortes Sanctorum from the Shrine of St Colluthus," in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, ed. David Frankfurter, RGRW 134 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 393–401. From the fragment published by Papini and Frankfurter, we know that this text was in use at the Shrine of Saint Colluthus in Antinoë, the same place that also yielded hundreds of oracle tickets. The contribution of Alex Kocar in this volume suggests a similar situation in Oxyrhynchus, the find place of the fragments, at the Shrine of Saint Philoxenus.

95 Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?* 44–46.

96 With many thanks to Funk for sharing his work on this manuscript: "Hoskyns Fragment in Dialect M (Cambridge, Corpus Christi College, MS 541 no. 78)," translation (11–11–2011) and edition (08–10–2011). The overlaps are noted in the critical edition of the Gospel of the Lots of Mary (Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?*).

97 Sofía Torallas Tovar, "A New Sahidic Coptic Fragment," *JCoptS* 17 (2015): 161: "one might see this text as a crossover."

98 The Montserrat fragment mentions a son (ⲡⲁϣⲏⲣⲉ, recto, l. 8), a monastic cell (ⲧⲉⲕⲣⲓ, verso, l. 9) and a certain Apa Anoup. This is probably the Apa Anoup from the Bawit Monastery, see Torallas Tovar, "A New Sahidic Coptic Fragment," 155–56.

6.9.1 Editions

Lucia Papini and David Frankfurter. "Fragments of the Sortes Sanctorum from the Shrine of St Colluthus." In David Frankfurter, ed., *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, Religions in the Graeco-Roman World 134 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 393–401. Edition of fragments from Antinoë.

AnneMarie Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles? The Gospel of the Lots of Mary*. Studien und Texte zu Antike und Christentum 89 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). Edition of Harvard Sackler Museum 1984.669.

Alexander Kocar, P.Oxy. (Forthcoming)

6.9.2 Translation

Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?*

6.9.3 Studies

Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?*

Kocar, this volume.

7 Group 3: Lot Texts Based on Sacred Books

The texts in this family purport to interpret a sacred book such as the Iliad, Aeneid, or the Bible.[99] Also the Sortes Ioannenses or *hermēneiai* fall into this category. That divinatory responses were based in authoritative bodies of texts such as Homer's Iliad and Odyssey or the Bible assumed that users of these texts were intimately familiar with the larger contexts of these verses and that these were taken into account in the consultation and interpretation. Four chapters in this book deal with these texts (Van der Horst, Meerson, Wilkinson, Childers).

Different methods of working with these authoritative texts can be distinguished, but they all presuppose that these inspired texts have a meaning that goes beyond their historical situation. One method involves using the book itself, and finding a passage in the text (Sortes Biblicae, Sortes Vergilianae), the other is a step more complicated, where verses of these texts are collected into separate, new texts, such as the Sortes Homerianae. In the case of the Sortes

99 On this category, see especially Pieter W. van der Horst, "Sortes: Sacred Books as Instant Oracles in Late Antiquity," in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, 143–74, and also Robert Wiśniewski, "Pagans, Jews, Christians, and a Type of Book Divination in Late Antiquity," *JECS* 24.4 (2016): 553–68.

Ioannenses, short divinatory interpretations preceded by the word *hermēneia*, are penned in the margins of Christian scriptures.

7.1 *Homeromanteion*

The ancients consulted Homer frequently for all sorts of divinatory and magical purposes.[100] Authors such as Cassius Dio and (Pseudo-)Plutarch mention the use of Homer in divination. As Pieter van der Horst notes, "Homer was widely regarded as a divinely inspired theologian, whose works had to be searched and analysed with all available exegetical techniques in order to retrieve the profound philosophical wisdom hidden in them."[101]

A specific Homer oracle (Ὁμηρουμαντείον) is preserved in three papyrus manuscripts.[102] The oracle consisted of 216 answers made up of verses from the Iliad and Odyssey, presented in groups of six. Each answer is preceded by three numbers indicating three throws of a die (1–1–1, 1–1–2, 1–1–3, etc., 1–2–1, 1–2–2, 1–2–3, 1–2–4 etc., to 6–6–6).[103] One papyrus contains detailed instructions on how to prepare for consultation, including this Homerically inspired invocation:

> Hear, Lord, that art in Lycia's fertile land
> Or yet in Troy, that hearst in ev'ry place
> His voice who suffers, as I suffer now
> Tell me this true, that I may come to know
> What most I wish and is my heart's desire.[104]

First attested in a manuscript from the Roman Imperial period, the oracle continued to be in use in late antiquity, if indeed one of the papyri, PGM VII, dates to the fourth or fifth century.[105] For a detailed discussion of this lot text, see Michael Meerson in this book.

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100 There are many quotations of Homer in the Greek magical papyri, e.g. PGM IV 469–70, 471–73, etc. On the topic, see Richard Heim, *Incantamenta magica graeca latina* (Teubner, 1892), section X. "Versus Homerici et Vergiliani," p. 514–20, nos. 151–60; Derek Collins, "The Magic of Homeric Verses," *CP* 103.3 (2008): 211–36; Gregg Schwendner, "Under Homer's Spell," *Magic and Divination in the Ancient World*, 107–18.

101 Van der Horst, "Sortes," 162.

102 *Homeromanteion* was the ancient designation, preserved in two of the papyri, PGM VII = P.Lond. I 121 and P.Oxy. LVI 3831.

103 Franco Maltomini, "P.Lond. 121 (= PGM VII), 1–221: Homeromanteion," *ZPE* 106 (1995): 107; and Meerson in this volume.

104 Trans. Peter Parsons, P.Oxy. LVI 3831, p. 46.

105 This date is proposed by G. Cavallo and M. Manfredi in *Corpus dei papiri filosofici* I.1** (Part I, volume 1, fasc. 2) (Florence: Olschki, 1992), p. V (re 43a, [Democritus]). F. Kenyon

7.1.1 Editions

P.Bon. 24 (2nd–3rd cent.). Ed. Orsolina Montevecchi and Giovanni Battista Pighi, "Prima ricognizione dei papiri dell'Università di Bologna," *Aegyptus* 27 (1947), 159–84, at 183–84.

PGM VII (= P.Lond. I 121) (4th–5th century). Ed. Franco Maltomini, "P.Lond. 121 (=PGM VII), 1–221: Homeromanteion," *ZPE* 106 (1995): 107–22.

P.Oxy. LVI 3831 (3rd–4th century). Ed. Peter J. Parsons, *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* LVI (London, 1989), 44–48.

7.1.2 Translation

Hans Dieter Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells*, Volume 1: Texts, Second Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 112–19.

7.1.3 Study

Michael Meerson, "Secondhand Homer," in this volume.

7.2 *Sortes Vergilianae*

Another system based on authoritative scripture is the Sortes Vergilianae. But unlike Homer's Iliad and Odyssey, and to a certain extent, biblical writings, Virgil's Aeneid was not excerpted to form a separate, special text. Bibliomantic use of Virgil in antiquity is attested in literary sources, first in the fourth-century *Historia augusta* and then in the Renaissance.[106]

7.2.1 Studies

Moa Ekbom, The *Sortes Vergilianae*: A Philological Study. (Uppsala: Uppsala universitet, 2013).

Yves de Kisch, "Les *Sortes Vergilianae* dans l'Histoire Auguste." *Mélanges d'archéologie et d'histoire* 82 (1970): 321–62.

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in the *editio princeps* suggested a third century date (P.Lond. I 121, p. 84: "The writing is a rather cursive uncial, probably of the 3rd century, clear and regular.") The later date is accepted by Maltonini, "P.Lond. 121," 107; Athanassia Zografou, "Un oracle homérique de l'Antiquité tardive," *Kernos: Revue internationale et pluridisciplinaire de religion grecque antique* 26 (2013): 173; and Meerson in this volume.

106 "[T]he evidence in *VMA* on "Virginian lots" is exclusively pre – and post-medieval. The first reference to them seems to be in the *Historia Augusta* …" Jan M. Ziolkowski and Michael C. J. Putnam, "Sortes Vergilianae (Virgilian Lots)," in *The Virgilian Tradition: The First Fifteen Hundred Years*, ed. Jan M. Ziolkowski and Michael C. J. Putnam (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 829.

Penelope Meyers Usher, "'Pricking in Virgil': Early Modern Prophetic Phronesis and the Sortes Virgilianae." *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 45 (2015): 557–71.

Jan M. Ziolkowski and Michael C.J. Putnam, *Sortes Vergilianae* (Virgilian Lots)," in idem, eds., *The Virgilian Tradition: The First Fifteen Hundred Years* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 829–30.

7.3 *Bibliomancy*

Jewish and Christian scriptures abound with references to divination, with varying degrees of approval.[107] As these texts came to be considered as authoritative sacred scriptures, they were themselves mined for advice and direction in various ways, through bibliomancy and through marginal notes.[108] Bibliomancy, opening a manuscript at random and considering the passage one finds as directive, is widely attested in late antiquity.[109] Pieter van der Horst discusses *Sortes biblicae judaicae* in this volume. For Christian uses, the best-known instance is Augustine of Hippo's chancing upon a passage in Romans 13 that proved life-changing for him.[110] Klingshirn has shown that church leaders did not condemn this kind of bibliomancy but rather targeted one specific kind of Christian divination, namely the text called Sortes Sanctorum (see above).

7.3.1 Studies

Edoardo Ferrarini, "Sortes biblicae et tradizioni agiografiche fra IV e VI secolo," in *Auctor et Auctoritas in Latinis Medii Aevi Litteris. Author and Authorship in Medieval Latin Literature*, Proceedings of the VIth Congress of the International Medieval Latin Committee (Benevento-Naples, November 9–13, 2010), ed. Edoardo D'Angelo and Jan Ziolkowski (Florence: SISMEL, 2014), 339–52.

Pieter W. van der Horst, "Sortes: Sacred Books as Instant Oracles in Late Antiquity," in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, 1998, 143–74.

Idem, in this volume.

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107 Examples of the use of lots in the Bible are Jonah 1: 7, Lev 16:8–10, Num 26:56, Josh 7:16–18, 1 Sam 14:40–42, Prov 16:33, and Acts 1:20b–26.

108 See Van der Horst, "Sortes."

109 In addition to Van der Horst, see Christoph B. Schulz, *Poetiken des Blätterns*, Literatur, Wissen, Poetik 4 (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2015).

110 Robert J. O'Connell, *Images of Conversion in St. Augustine's Confessions* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1996); Van der Horst, "Sortes," 152–55.

7.4 *Sortes Ioannenses* (hermēneiai)

A practice that developed from bibliomancy involves the consultation of mainly Gospel manuscripts that have written in their margins short, divinatory phrases labeled *hermēneia* (interpretation). Numerous examples are preserved in papyrus fragments and in larger parchment manuscripts, for instance the bilingual Greek-Latin Codex Bezae and a Syriac codex at the British Library in London (London BL Add MS 17119). Most frequently these *hermēneiai* occur in the margins of the Gospel of John. Overlooked or disdained in earlier scholarship as mere random notes,[111] two contributions in this volume bring a new level of understanding to how these worked as aids for biblical interpretation. In their chapters in this volume, Wilkinson and Childers demonstrate that these oracular responses function as a bibliomantic tool, an aid in interpreting the biblical passages at which they are placed to spell out the relevance of bible passages for the querent in easily comprehensible language.

7.4.1 Edition

James Rendel Harris, *The Annotators of the Codex Bezae* (*with Some Notes on Sortes Sanctorum*) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1901), 59–74. Despite numerous transcription errors, this remains the only edition of the *sortes* found in Greek in the codex Bezae and in Latin in Paris, BnF, lat. 11553. Wilkinson's paper in this volume lists the papyrus witnesses in Greek and Coptic. Childers' paper in this volume and in his second article listed below describe the Syriac version found in London, BL, Add 17,119, and the Armenian version in Graz, Universität 2058/2.

7.4.2 Studies

Kevin Wilkinson, "*Hermēneiai* in Manuscripts of John's Gospel," in this volume.

Jeff W. Childers, "Hermeneutics and Divination," this volume.

Jeff W. Childers, "'You have Found What You Seek': The Form and Function of a Sixth-Century Divinatory Bible in Syriac," in *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture*, edited by Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 242–71.

111 Otto Stegmüller, "Zu den Bibelorakeln im Codex Bezae," *Biblica* 34.1 (1953): 15: The *hermēneiai* "sind so allgemein erhalten, dass man sie beinahe wahllos auf die Verse des Evangelientextes verteilen kann. Sie sind sicher auch nicht originell, sondern stammen aus heidnischer Praxis. Es lohnt sich nicht die Mühe, dies im einzelnen nachzuweisen."

7.5 *Lachmētērion*

A divinatory text called Lachmētērion of the Holy Apostles (λαχμητήριον τῶν ἁγίων ἀποστόλων)[112] preserved in a late medieval manuscript may in this form or another have been already known in late antiquity. The seventh-century monk-priest Anastasius of Sinai (ca. 630 to after 700)[113] was asked: "Is it right for a Christian to open for sortilege (*lachmētērion*)?"[114] One can complete this sentence as "to open <the Bible> for bibliomancy?"[115] But it is also possible that other books were used.[116] Anastasius answered as follows:

> We find no encouragement anywhere to do this, but the Fathers, to prevent the faithful going to sorcerers and diviners, thought up *lachmētērion*. Therefore anyone who wishes to open <a book> should first supplicate God with prayer and then, after prayer, open <a book>, asking God if He really orders one to open <the book> about the subject in question. Then if He persuades you, open, but if He dissuades you, do not open.[117]

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112 For instance, a text preserved in codex at the Biblioteca Nacional in Madrid, Ms. 4644 (ca. 1490), fols 83v–92v: "Lachmeterion seu methodus diuinationis ex euangeliis excerpta, constans 87 sectionibus." See Gregorio de Andrés, *Catálogo de los codices griegos de la Biblioteca Nacional* (Madrid: Ministerio de Cultura, Dirección General del Libro y Bibliotecas, 1987), 186–89 (quote from 188). See also Klingshirn, "Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*," 162. A 'Book of the Lots of the Apostles' is listed as forbidden in the Decretum Gelatianum.

113 Little is known about Anastasius. According to Joseph Munitiz, he was a monk-priest at the Saint Catherine Monastery in the Sinai and a "polemical yet kindly figure." See Joseph A. Munitiz, *Anastasios of Sinai, Questions and Answers*, Corpus Christianorum in translation (Turnhout: Brepols, 2011), 9. According to John Haldon, however, Alexandria is "the most likely base from which Anastasius conducted much of his business." Haldon, "The Works of Anastasius of Sinai: A Key Source for the History of Seventh-Century East Mediterranean Society and Belief," in *The Byzantine and Early Islamic Near East.* (*Papers of the First Workshop on Late Antiquity and Early Islam*), ed. Averil Cameron and Lawrence I Conrad, Studies in Late Antiquity and Early Islam 1 (Princeton: The Darwin Press, 1999), 114.

114 Πρέπει ἆρα τῷ Χριστιανῷ ἀνοίγειν ἐν λαχμητηρίῳ (question 57). Edition: Marcel Richard and Joseph A Munitiz, *Anastasii Sinaitae: Quaestiones et responsiones*, CCSG 59 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006), 108.

115 Munitiz, *Questions*, 222, renders the question as "Is it right for a Christian to open <the Bible> for *lachmeterion* [in search of an omen text]?" The word λαχμητήριον (also written as λαχνιστήριον) occurs only very rarely in Greek literature. Lampe, *Patristic Greek Lexicon*, 794: λαχνιστήριον "*casting of lots, sortilegium* (by opening Bible.)" See also Haldon, "The Works of Anastasius of Sinai," 140.

116 See Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?* 87.

117 Οὐδαμοῦ εὑρίσκομεν ἐπιτροπὴν τοῦτο ποιεῖν, ἀλλ' οἱ πατέρες, διὰ τὸ μὴ πορεύεσθαι τοὺς πιστοὺς εἰς φαρμακοὺς καὶ μάντας, ἐπενόησαν τὸ λαχμητήριον. 2. Ὁ γοῦν βουλόμενος ἀνοῖξαι, πρῶτον δι' εὐχῆς παρακαλέσει τὸν Θεόν, καὶ μετὰ τὴν εὐχὴν ἀνοίξει, ἐρωτῶν τὸν Θεόν, εἰ ἆρα κελεύει

The answer shows that Anastasius was familiar with the practices described in the user's instructions in lot books.

8 Group 4: Individualized Lots

Finally, there is a category of almost completely open-ended or highly individualized lots. Ticket oracles function as an example here.

8.1 *Ticket Oracles*

Ticket oracles served as a distinct means to obtain detailed answers to specific, individualized issues involving immediate, practical action.[118] The procedure worked as follows: A querent submitted two sealed tickets with very similar texts: one with a positively phrased query, the other with a negative one.[119] How the selection process worked exactly remains unknown, but the ticket that was returned was considered the divine answer.[120]

In Egypt this system of lot divination was already practiced in Pharaonic times – tickets have been found in Demotic, Greek and Coptic.[121] As

αὐτῷ ἀνοῖξαι περὶ τοῦ πράγματος αὐτοῦ. Καὶ ἐὰν ἐπιτρέψῃ σοι, ἄνοιξον· εἰ δὲ ἀποτρέψει σε, μὴ ἀνοίξῃς. Richard and Munitiz, *Anastasii Sinaitae*, 108–9. Translation adapted from Munitiz, *Questions and Answers*, 170–71.

118 Grammatically, texts on the tickets do not constitute questions but rather conditional clauses consisting of a *protasis* (the 'if' clause) and an *apodosis* phrased as a command.

119 In multiple cases, both tickets have been preserved, for example, two papyri found at Oxyrhynchus, P.Harris 54 and P.Oxy. XVI 1926. They read: "O my Lord God Almighty and St. Philoxenus my patron, I beseech you by the great name of the Lord God, if it is your will and you are helping me to take the banking-business, I beseech you to bid me learn this, and speak." And the negative version: "O my Lord God Almighty and St. Philoxenus my patron, I beseech you by the great name of the Lord God, if it is not your will that I speak either about the bank or about the weighing-office, to bid me learn this, in order that I may not speak." Herbert C. Youtie, "Question to a Christian Oracle," *ZPE* 18 (1975): 253–54. For other examples, see AnneMarie Luijendijk, "'If you order that I wash my feet, then bring me this ticket': Encountering Saint Colluthus at Antinoë," in Mika Ahuvia and Alex Kocar, eds., *Placing Ancient Texts. The Ritual and Rhetorical Use of Space*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 197–225.

120 People used those tickets as amulets according to David Frankfurter, "Voices, Books, and Dreams: The Diversification of Divination Media in Late Antique Egypt," in Johnston and Struck, *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, 237.

121 Arietta Papaconstantinou, "Oracles chrétiens dans l'Égypte byzantine: Le témoignage des papyrus," *ZPE* (1994): 281–86; Dominique Valbelle and Geneviève Husson, "Les questions oraculaires d'Égypte: Histoire de la recherche, nouveautés et perspectives," in Willy Clarysse, Antoon Schoors, and Harco Willems, eds., *Egyptian Religion: The Last Thousand Years*, 2 vols., OLA 84–85 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 2:1055–1071; Jaroslav Černỳ,

Frankfurter has shown, Demotic ticket oracles continue in Greek and Coptic in "the same formula."[122] Egyptian shrines for ticket divination are attested for Saint Philoxenus at Oxyrhynchus (on the shrine see Kocar in this volume), for Saint Colluthus at Antinoë,[123] and for Saints Leontius, Cosmas and Damian at uncertain locations.[124] Although best attested in Egypt, this form of divination was practiced more widely around the Mediterranean.[125] Gregory of Tours refers to a similar ritual in the Life of St. Patroclus[126] and according to Anna Comnena, her father, emperor Alexius I Comnenus (1081–1118), applied this procedure to divine whether he should go to war against the Cumans.[127]

"Egyptian Oracles," in Richard A. Parker, ed., *A Saite Oracle Papyrus from Thebes in the Brooklyn Museum* (*P.Brooklyn 47.218.3*), Brown University Studies 4 (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1962), 35–48; Claude Gallazzi, "Le 300 nuove domande oracoli di Tebtynis," in A. Gasse, F. Servajean, C. Thiers, eds., *Et in Aegypto et ad Aegyptum. Recueil d'études dédiées à Jean-Claude Grenier II* (Montpellier: Université Paul Valéry, 2012), 311–44.

122 Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 159.

123 Some 200 oracle tickets have been found at the shrine of Saint Colluthus in Antinoë. Alain Delattre, "L'oracle de Kollouthos à Antinoé: Nouvelles perspectives," *Studi e materiali di storia delle religioni* 79.1 (2013): 123.

124 See Arietta Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte: des Byzantins aux Abbassides: L'apport des inscriptions et des papyrus grecs et coptes* (Paris: CNRS Editions, 2001), 361; Papaconstantinou, "Oracles chrétiens dans l'Égypte byzantine"; David Frankfurter, "Christian Oracle Shrines," in *Religions of Late Antiquity in Practice*, ed. Richard Valantasis (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 469–72.

125 Several ticket oracles are among the more than four thousand published lamellae from the oracle of Zeus at Dodona, although, as Robert Parker notes, "The tiny number of tickets bearing the formula 'pick this one' or its variants might seem to show that this method was in fact very rare." Parker, "The Lot Oracle at Dodona," *ZPE* 194 (2015): 112. The lamellae are recently published: Sōtērēs I. Dakarēs et al., Τα Χρηστήρια Ἐλάσματα της Δωδώνης, Bibliothēkē tēs en Athēnais Archaiologikēs Etaireias 285 (Athens: Archaiologikē Etaireia, 2013).

126 In order to receive divine guidance on what form of ascetic life to practice, Patroclus left small notes on the altar in the church, where he then prayed for three (days and) nights to learn what God decided for him: He was to be a hermit (*Tunc pro auspitio quoddam brevibus conscriptis, posuit super altare, vigilans et orans tribus* [*diebus et tribus*] *noctibus, ut, quid ei Dominus agere iuberet, dignaretur manifestissime declarare.*) *Liber Vitae Patrum* 9.2 in Bruno Krusch and Wilhelm Levison, eds., *Gregorii Episcopi Turonensis Historiarum Libri X*, MGH, Scriptores rerum Merovingicarum, t. 1, pars 1, fasc. 1, 3 (Hannover: Impensis Biblioplii Hahniani, 1937), 703.

127 It is worth quoting this passage in full (in translation): "Alexios … felt unable to trust his own judgement and was unwilling to rely on his own unaided calculations. So he referred the whole matter to God and asked Him to decide. All the churchmen and soldiers were summoned to an evening meeting in the Great Church. The emperor himself attended and so did the Patriarch Nicholas … The emperor wrote a question out on two tablets: should he set out to attack the Cumans; or not. They were then sealed and the patriarch was commanded to place them on the Holy Table. After hymns had been sung all through

8.1.1 Editions (selection)

A critical edition of the approximately 200 oracle tickets from the Shrine of Colluthus is in preparation by Alain Delattre. Preliminary editions of tickets from this shrine are:

Sergio Donadoni, "Una domanda oracolare cristiana da Antinoe," *Rivista degli studi orientali* 29 (1954): 183–186. Edition of one Coptic ticket with Italian translation.

Sergio Donadoni, "Due testi oracolari copti," in Antonio Guarino and Luigi Labruna, eds., *Synteleia: Vincenzo Arangio-Ruiz*, vol. 1, Biblioteca di Labeo 2 (Napoli: Jovene, 1964), 286–92. Edition of two Coptic tickets with Italian translation.

Lucia Papini, "Biglietti oracolari in copto dalla necropoli nord di Antinoë," in Tito Orlandi and Frederik Wisse, eds., *Acts of the Second International Congress of Coptic Study, Roma, 22–26 September 1980* (Roma: C.I.M, 1985), 245–56. Edition of six Coptic tickets, no translation.

Lucia Papini, "Due biglietti oracolari cristiani," in Manfredo Manfredi, ed., *Trenta testi greci da papiri letterari e documentari: editi in occasione del XVII Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia, Napoli 19–26 Maggio 1983* (Firenze: Istituto papirologico "G. Vitelli," 1983), 68–70. Edition of two Greek tickets with Italian translation.

Alain Delattre, "Textes coptes et grecs d'Antinoé," in Rosario Pintaudi, *Antinoupolis I* (Scavi e Materiali 1; Florence: Istituto Papirologica 'G.Vitelli,' 2008), 131–162. Includes the edition of two oracle tickets (152–154) and French translation.

8.1.2 Translations

Italian: Donadoni, "Una domanda oracolare"; "Due testi oracolari copti"; Papini, "Due biglietti oracolari cristiani,".

French: Delattre, "Textes coptes et grecs d'Antinoé."

English: AnneMarie Luijendijk, "'If you order that I wash my feet, then bring me this ticket': Encountering Saint Colluthus at Antinoë," in Mika Ahuvia and Alex Kocar, eds., *Placing Ancient Texts. The Ritual and Rhetorical Use of Space*, Texts and Studies in Ancient Judaism (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 197–225.

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the night, Nicholas went to the altar, picked up one of the papers and brought it out. In the presence of the whole company he broke it open and read aloud what was written on it. The emperor accepted the decision as though it derived from some divine oracle." Anna Comnena, *The Alexiad*, trans. E. R. A. Sewter and Peter Frankopan, Penguin Classics (New York: Penguin, 2009), 264 (book X 2).

8.1.3 *Studies*

Papini, Lucia. "Domande oracolari: elenco delle attestazioni in greco ed in copto." *Analecta papyrologica* 4 (1992): 21–27. A list and discussion of the 55 Greek and Coptic oracle tickets known to the author at the time.

Alain Delattre, "Nouveaux textes coptes d'Antinoé," in Traianos Gagos and Adam Hyatt, eds., *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth International Congress of Papyrology, Ann Arbor 2007*, American Studies in Papyrology (Ann Arbor: 2010), 171–74.

Alain Delattre, "L'oracle de Kollouthos à Antinoé. Nouvelles perspectives." *Oracoli, visioni, profezie. L'Egitto da Alessandro il Grande all'Alto Medioevo. Oracles, Visions, Prophecies. Egypt from Alexander the Great to the Early Middle Ages: SMSR* 79 (2013): 123–33.

Luijendijk (forthcoming).

8.2 *Arabic and Hebrew Lot Books*

Arabic and Hebrew lot books (Goralot) fall outside the chronological scope of this volume,[128] just as do later Greek and Latin texts.[129] However, a lot manuscript from the Cairo Genizah to be published by Gideon Bohak preserves a late antique Jewish text written in Palestinian Jewish Aramaic with some Greek loanwords. Future research will be able to take it into consideration.

128 On the Arabic texts, see G. Flügel, *Die Loosbücher der Muhammedaner* (Leipzig 1860). The so-called Sortes Regis Amalrici, a Latin text with a list of 28 questions and matching answers, does not constitute direct evidence for Arabic lot divination but refers to Arabic themes and persons to render the text exotic, so Charles Burnett, "The Sortes Regis Amalrici: An Arabic Divinatory Work in the Latin Kingdom of Jerusalem?" *Scripta Mediterranea* 20 (2015): 229–37. A fascinating study that traces the practices of lot casting from the Ancient Near East into the Islamic period and thereby also discussing Jewish, Hebrew and early Christian lot practices is Patricia Crone and Adam Silverstein, "The Ancient Near East and Islam: The Case of Lot-Casting." *Journal of Semitic Studies* 55 (2010): 423–50. For a detailed study on the Hebrew texts, see Evelyn Burkhardt, "Hebräische Losbuchhandschriften: Zur Typologie einer jüdischen Divinationsmethode," in Wout van Bekkum, Klaus Herrmann, Margarete Schlüter, and Giuseppe Veltri, eds., *Jewish Studies Between the Disciplines – Judaistik zwischen den Disziplinen: Papers in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday*, 95–148.

129 See, for instance, László Sándor Chardonnens, *Anglo-Saxon Prognostics, 900–1100: Study and Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 2007); Allegra Iafrate, "'Si Sequeris Casum, Casus Frangit Tibi Nasum': La raccolta delle sorti del Ms Ashmole 304," *Aevum* 85 (2011): 457–88.

9 Conclusion

In this chapter we have provided a discussion and inventory of a wide range of lot texts from late antiquity while also taking into consideration (loosely) related earlier and later lot texts. We have classified the many different lot texts into four distinct and partly overlapping groups: (1) Books of Fate, (2) lot texts with general answers, (3) lot texts based on sacred books, and (4) individualized lots. For each category, we have presented the texts, their methods of consultation, and when available, editions, translations, and scholarship.

In addition to providing a status quo of the field, this overview brings out starkly the unevenness of the preservation of lot texts. Some texts have been preserved over the centuries and are extant in multiple manuscript copies or even print, while others are attested in just one fragmentary piece of papyrus. Several of the texts discussed here are only recently published or even forthcoming, and are here taken into consideration within the larger group of lot literature for the first time. Furthermore, the inventory shows which texts have been studied and where there are still major gaps in scholarship, including a lack of editions, translations, studies, and access to manuscript images. Together, all of this points to exciting new avenues for future scholarship.

CHAPTER 2

The Instruments of Lot Divination

William E. Klingshirn

On the reverse of a Roman denarius of the year 69 BCE, a child holds a small rectangular object labeled with the word SORS (fig. 2.1).[1] If the female figure on the obverse is Fortuna Primigenia (fig. 2.2), as seems likely, the lot depicted would stand for those used at her renowned shrine in Praeneste.[2] Scenes of lot divination on Etruscan and Italic sculpture show similar objects being drawn from large urns in a ceremonial setting, and written lots resembling these in Etruscan, Greek, Oscan, and Latin survive in the archaeological record.[3] Indeed, a bronze cylinder found at Casalbordino may have been used to dispense lots of just this shape.[4] The device is pierced with ten square holes, labeled with the Oscan letters (and numerals) *a* to *k*, and decorated with the head of a reclining female, possibly Fortune. Across the Adriatic, in

FIGURE 2.1 Denarius of M. Plaetorius Cestianus. Reverse
COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

FIGURE 2.2 Denarius of M. Plaetorius Cestianus. Obverse
COURTESY OF THE AMERICAN NUMISMATIC SOCIETY

1 Michael H. Crawford, *Roman Republican Coinage*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Pres, 1974), no. 405/2.

2 Jacqueline Champeaux, *Fortuna: recherches sur le culte de la Fortune à Rome et dans le monde romain des origines à la mort de César*, vol. 1 (Rome: École Française de Rome, 1982), 65.

3 William E. Klingshirn, "Inventing the *sortilegus*: Lot Divination and Cultural Identity in Italy, Rome, and the Provinces," in *Religion in Republican Italy*, ed. Celia E. Schultz and Paul B. Harvey, Jr., YCS 33 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 137–63, at 140–43.

4 Chieti: Museo Nazionale, inv. 18573, described in Michael H. Crawford, ed., *Imagines Italicae: A Corpus of Italic Inscriptions*, vol. 2 (London: University of London, 2011), 1272–73. I am grateful to Prof. Crawford for bringing this object to my attention prior to its publication.

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northwestern Greece, hundreds of thin lead strips survive from the shrine of Zeus at Dodona.[5] Dating from the sixth to the third century BCE, these were inscribed with questions, rolled up, and placed in an urn, ultimately to be drawn out and answered yes or no, probably by a separately drawn lot.[6]

Such examples could be multiplied.[7] Like its ubiquitous modern versions, ancient sortilege depended heavily on instruments, both artificial, like written tablets (or later, books), and natural, such as pebbles, twigs, or beans. Sortilege was not the only form of ancient divination to use instruments, of course. In a telling passage from his treatise on astrology that surveys the astral influences on various types of souls, Ptolemy includes souls "skilled in instruments" (ὀργανικάς) and in "machines" (μηχανικάς) among "those that investigate hidden things and inquire into unseen things (διερευνητικὰς δὲ τῶν ἀποκρύφων καὶ ζητητικὰς τῶν ἀθεωρήτων), such as souls practicing magic (μαγικάς), those involved in the mysteries (μυστηριακάς), those skilled in atmospheric phenomena (μετεωρολογικάς) … those that perform wonders (θαυματοποιούς), those expert in the stars (ἀστρολογικάς), philosophical ones (φιλοσόφους), those that observe birds (οἰωνοσκοπικάς) and interpret dreams (ὀνειροκριτικάς), and those like them" (*Tetr.* 3.14.5, ed Hübner).[8]

In fact, diviners at both ends of the classical divinatory spectrum used instruments, from astrologers at the 'technical' extreme, whose kits included boards, diagrams, and sacred stones,[9] to the Pythia at the 'natural' extreme, who used a tripod set over a chasm in Delphi. Visitors to the incubation oracle of Amphiarus slept on rams' skins in preparation for prophetic dreams, and at Demeter's oracle in Patrai, a mirror dipped into a sacred spring revealed the inquirer's prospects.[10] Francesco Roncalli has argued that the primary instrument of haruspicy was the haruspex himself,[11] and

5 Now edited by Soterios Dakares et al., *Τὰ χρηστήρια ἐλάσματα τῆς Δωδώνης τῶν ἀνασκαφών Δ. Ευαγγελίδη* [*Ta chresteria elasmata tes Dodones ton anaskaphon D. Euangelide*], 2 vols. (Athens, 2013).

6 H. W. Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus: Dodona, Olympia, Ammon* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 108–11.

7 Further examples in *ThesCRA*, vol. 5 (Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2005), 413–15.

8 Translations are my own unless otherwise indicated.

9 James Evans, "The Astrologer's Apparatus: A Picture of Professional Practice in Greco-Roman Egypt," *Journal for the History of Astronomy* 35.1 (2004): 1–44.

10 Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 94, 98.

11 Francesco Roncalli, "Between Divination and Magic: Role, Gesture, and Instruments of the Etruscan *Haruspex*," in *Material Aspects of Etruscan Religion*, ed. L. Bouke van der Meer (Leuven: Peeters, 2010), 117–26, at 117.

one could further identify all persons possessed for divination as bodily instruments of the divine.[12]

One difference between sortilege and other forms of divination, however, and the problem this chapter chiefly addresses, is that unlike other forms of divination, sortilege appeared to offer not much more than its instruments. No movements of stars or birds, no bloody entrails, no vapors from the deep, no dreams in the night – only the hidden knowledge its practitioners acquired through the handling of objects (often very humble ones) and the apparently random configurations they presented. These features made sortilege generally inexpensive and widely accessible, but also exposed it to multiple objections from philosophers, rival diviners, and other critics.

I have described elsewhere the means by which lot diviners could counteract some of these objections by emphasizing the beauty and holiness of their instruments or the impressive surroundings in which they were employed.[13] It was also possible (and indeed, probably common) for lot diviners to argue that like other professionals who used tools in their business – physicians, architects, surveyors – it was their skills of diagnosis and interpretation and not the use of instruments as such that set them apart. This view assumes that divinatory knowledge is not radically unlike other human knowledge, and is in fact part of an unbroken continuum of knowledge between human and divine, a controversial position in late antiquity to which I return at the end of the chapter.

For now, I would like to focus on the objections themselves – both to lot divination generally and to its instruments in particular – as well as on the theoretical problems these objections raised for the propriety and veracity of lot divination. Following some hints in Iamblichus and Augustine, I will argue that the supposed flaws of lot divination could be seen by participants to verify rather than refute its truth claims. By conceiving the instruments of lot divination as divine rather than human, ancient practitioners and clients could validly see them as pathways to truth. And once they were seen as such, in a metaphysics in which the divine, however transcendent, remained present in the world, their materiality and apparent randomness demonstrated not baseness and accident, as critics charged, but divine immanence and patterns of meaning – qualities that only divine power could bring to light from what

12 Iamblichus, *Response to Porphyry* 3.7, 11. Known as *De Mysteriis* since Marsilio Ficino's Latin translation of 1497, Iamblichus's text, more accurately titled *Response to Porphyry's Letter to Anebo*, is cited here in the edition of Henri Dominique Saffrey and Alain-Philippe Segonds, *Jamblique: Réponse à Porphyre* (*De mysteriis*) (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2013).

13 Klingshirn, "Inventing the *sortilegus*," 154–58.

appeared to be the random and material signs of a random and material universe.[14] This interpretation fits the fragmentary ancient evidence and takes account of some of the relevant anthropological literature. I am particularly indebted to theories of divination that emphasize the importance of truth-seeking in divination.[15] In the words of the dream diviner Artemidorus, ὅ τι δ' ἂν ὁ μάντις ὅγε ἀληθὴς ἀποκρίνηται, τούτῳ πιστεύειν χρή, "It is necessary to believe whatever a true diviner gives as a response."[16]

Objections to lot divination in antiquity generally fell into three main categories: 1) its reliance on 'chance'; 2) its low cost and appeal to the lower classes, and therefore – to elite writers, at least – its perceived lack of value; and 3) its need for instruments, especially those of a mean or domestic kind. Cicero's skeptical character Marcus in *De divinatione* expresses the first objection well:

> dicendum igitur putas de sortibus? quid enim sors est? idem prope modum quod micare quod talos iacere quod tesseras, quibus in rebus temeritas et casus non ratio nec consilium valet. tota res est inventa fallaciis aut ad quaestum aut ad superstitionem aut ad errorem.
>
> *Div.* 2.85, ed. AX
>
> Do you think, therefore, that lots need to be discussed? Indeed, what is a lot? It is almost the same as playing the game of *morra* or throwing knuckle-bones or dice, in which accident (*temeritas*) and chance (*casus*) prevail rather than reason (*ratio*) and planning (*consilium*). The whole thing was fraudulently contrived for the purpose of profit, superstition, or error.

By comparing sortilege to games of chance, the passage casts doubt on its respectability, impugns the motives of its practitioners, and above all suggests its failure to achieve the truth that clients expect. Whether it involved the unpredictable number of fingers raised in the game of *morra* or randomizing

14 Andras Zempléni, "How to Say Things with Assertive Acts? About Some Pragmatic Properties of Senoufa Divination," in *Beyond Textuality: Asceticism and Violence in Anthropological Interpretation*, ed. Gilles Bibeau and Ellen Corin (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), 233–47.

15 For example, Pascal Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication: A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Martin Holbraad, *Truth in Motion: The Recursive Anthropology of Cuban Divination* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012).

16 Artemidorus, *Oneir*. 3.20, ed. Pack. See now Daniel E. Harris-McCoy, *Artemidorus' Oneirocritica: Text, Translation, and Commentary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012).

devices such as (four-sided) knucklebones and (six-sided) dice, Cicero associates lot divination not with the determination of hidden truths, but with unpredictability and risk-taking, the very antithesis of reason and planning. Interestingly, he does not associate it with a far more respectable and, one might even say, 'rational' use of lots, the sortition used in the middle and late Republic to apportion provinces and other political responsibilities. This "ritually defined allotment," as Roberta Stewart has described it, shared many features with lot divination, but could also be distinguished from it, as in Cicero's criticism of it here.[17]

What Marcus does not say about lots in this passage, although his brother Quintus hints at it earlier in the dialogue (1.134), is that lots were also a cheap form of divination, and therefore used mainly by lower-status clients. Juvenal offers our best evidence for this in satire 6, ostensibly an effort to dissuade the addressee from marriage. An unseemly appetite for divination is counted among a wife's faults, and lot divination, together with physiognomy, are said to be among the only forms available to poor women: "If she's of humble status (*mediocris*), she'll roam around the space at both ends of the turning posts and draw out the *sortes*."[18] A note in the mid-fifth century scholia on Juvenal explains: *si pauper erit mulier superstitiosa, in circo quaerit quos consulat: ibi nam antea proponere solebant huius artis professores*, "if she is poor, the superstitious woman looks in the Circus for those she is consulting: for there previously the professors of this art used to hold forth."[19]

I am not aware of any direct evidence for the price of such independent (rather than shrine-based) consultations in Rome, but a similar type of independent divination in Asia Minor satirized in the second century CE by Lucian was priced at two obols per oracle.[20] It is difficult to believe that lot divination

17 Roberta Stewart, *Public Office in Early Rome: Ritual Procedure and Political Practice* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998). For an ancient expression of the distinction see Festus, ed. Wallace Martin Lindsay, *Glossaria Latina*, vol. 4 (Paris, 1930), 396, s.v. *sors: Sors et patrimonium significat. Unde consortes dicimus; et dei responsum et quod cuique accidit in sortiendo*. See further, Cristiano Grottanelli, "La Cléromancie ancienne et le dieu Hermès," in *Sorteggio Pubblico e Cleromanzia dall'Antichità all'Età Moderna*, ed. Federica Cordano and Cristiano Grottanelli (Milan: ET, 2001), 155–96.

18 Juvenal, *Sat.* 6.582–583. For the topographical details of the consultation, see Edward Courtney, *A Commentary on the Satires of Juvenal* (London: Athlone, 1980), 338–39; Lindsay Watson and Patricia Watson, *Juvenal: Satire 6* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 256.

19 Ed. Wessner ad loc. For the date, see Alan Cameron, "The Date of the Scholia Vetustiora on Juvenal," *CLQ* 60.2 (2010): 569–76.

20 Lucian, *Alex.* 19. The diviner was Amphilochus, son of Amphiaraus of Thebes. The same fee is mentioned by Maximus of Tyre, *Diss*. 13.3, ed. Michael B. Trapp (Teubner, 1994).

would normally have cost more than this, a price that, on the scale of divinatory value, would have suggested low worth, at least to an aristocrat. Other types were much more expensive: in his *Metamorphoses* (2.13), also composed in the second century, Apuleius introduced an astrologer who charged 100 denarii for each consultation.

The third and most significant category of objections to lot divination focused on the instruments themselves. Those who did not entirely reject the use of instruments in divination could still find fault with those used in lot divination, principally on the grounds that they were commonplace or domestic objects too mean to convey divine truth. Artemidorus, for instance, approved the use of some instruments, but attacked rival diviners for their use of other, less reputable kinds.

> ὅσα γὰρ ἂν λέγωσι Πυθαγορισταὶ φυσιογνωμονικοὶ ἀστραγαλομάντεις τυρομάντεις [γυρομάντεις V] κοσκινομάντεις μορφοσκόποι χειροσκόποι λεκανομάντεις νεκυομάντεις, ψευδῆ πάντα καὶ ἀνυπόστατα χρὴ νομίζειν· καὶ γὰρ αἱ τέχναι αὐτῶν εἰσι τοιαῦται καὶ αὐτοὶ μὲν μαντικῆς οὐδὲ βραχὺ ἴσασι, γοητεύοντες δὲ καὶ ἀπατῶντες ἀποδιδύσκουσι τοὺς ἐντυγχάνοντας.
>
> *Oneir.* 2.69, ed. PACK[21]

> For whatever Pythagoreans say, and physiognomists, and those who divine from knuckle-bones and from cheese [and from finely ground flour], and those who divine from sieves and from bodily shapes, and those who divine from hands and from bowls, and necromancers – it is necessary to regard all of this as false and without foundation. Indeed, the arts of these men are of the same kind, and they themselves do not know even a little about divination. Rather, they bewitch, deceive, and strip those who come to them.

Of the instruments listed here, some are well-attested, such as the knucklebones used in lot divination, the bowls used in lecanomancy,[22] and the sieves used in coscinomancy (Theoc. *Id.* 3.31); others are quite obscure and possibly meant to be fanciful, such as the cheese used by cheese-diviners. In both categories, however, it is the domestic character of the instruments that, at least in part, draws scorn from Artemidorus. Use of such instruments does not occur, he suggests, in the only prophecies that are true: τὰ ὑπὸ θυτῶν λεγόμενα καὶ

21 On the possibility that the reading of V (Venice, Biblioteca Nazionale Marciana, MS 268) should be retained, see Ganschinietz, *PW* Suppl. III (1918), s.v. Γυρομάντεις, col. 866.

22 Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination*, 159–60.

οἰωνιστῶν καὶ ἀστεροσκόπων καὶ τερατοσκόπων καὶ ὀνειροκριτῶν καὶ ἡπατοσκόπων, "the things said by sacrificers, bird diviners, observers of the stars, observers of portents, dream interpreters, and those who examine livers."[23]

A more complete rejection of instruments can be found in the preface to a fifth-century pseudonymous commentary on Jeremiah attributed to John Chrysostom. While accepting some forms of Christian divination such as dream divination and inspired prophecy, the author rejected all pagan diviners and forms of divination, especially those that employed instruments.

> αὐτοὶ γὰρ οἱ ἀλευρομάντεις, καὶ ἡ διὰ τῶν μορίων μαντευομένη Πυθία, καὶ ἡ διὰ τοῦ δρυὸς ἡ Δωδωνὶς ἱέρεια, καὶ ἡ διὰ σπλάγχνων, καὶ πτήσεως, καὶ κλαγγῶν, συμβόλων τε καὶ πταρμῶν, καὶ κληδόνων, καὶ βροντῆς, καὶ χειρῶν, μυῶν τε καὶ γαλῆς, καὶ τρυσμῶν καὶ ὤτων ἤχου, καὶ σώματος παλμῶν, καὶ χαλίκων, ῥάβδων τε καὶ φλοιῶν, διὰ νεκρῶν τε καὶ γαστρὸς, ὀνομάτων τε καὶ ἄστρων, καὶ φιαλῶν, μυρίων τε ὅσων τοιούτων.
>
> PG 64:741AB.[24]

> These include wheat flour-diviners, the Pythia divining through her genitals, the priestess at Dodona divining through the oak, and prophecy by means of entrails, flight, cries, omens, sneezes, chance utterances, thunder, hands, mice, a weasel, gurglings, ringing of the ears, bodily twitches, pebbles, wands, the bark of trees, dead bodies, the stomach, names, stars, bowls, and countless such things as these.

Implicit in this list of shameful and ridiculous divinatory methods and instruments is a notion the author later makes explicit, that the difference between Christian and pagan divination turns precisely on their use of instruments: Καὶ οἱ μὲν ὀργάνων δέονται, καὶ τόπων, καὶ καιρῶν, καὶ ἐπὶ χρήμασι λέγουσι· Θεὸς δὲ τούτων ἀπήλλακται. Τοιαύτη μὲν γὰρ ἥ τε θεία καὶ διαβολικὴ προφητεία, "And [pagans] need instruments, places, and proper times, and speak for money. God is free of these things. For such is [the difference between] divine and diabolical prophecy."[25] Christian prophets, on the other hand, are like the philosophers in Aristotle's *Protrepticus* who do not "need instruments and places for their work."[26] Nor was pseudo-Chrysostom the only Christian writer to make this

23 Artemidorus, *Oneir*. 2.69, ed. Pack.

24 The text in Migne is drawn from the edition of Michael Ghisler, *In Ieremiam Prophetam Commentarii*, vol. 1 (Rome, 1623), Appendix: Catena ex veteribus patribus Graecis, pp. 15–16.

25 *PG* 64:741C.

26 Fr. 56 Düring, preserved in Iamblichus, *Protr*. 40, lines 25–26 Pistelli: οὐδὲ γὰρ δέονται πρὸς τὴν ἐργασίαν ὀργάνων οὐδὲ τόπων.

point. Already in the first decade of the fifth century, Synesius of Cyrene had noted the disadvantages of divinatory methods that required instruments:

> Ἀλλ' αἵ γε προγνώσεις αἱ διὰ τῶν ποικίλων ὀργάνων παραγινόμεναι, ἀγαπητὸν εἰ τὴν πλείω μερίδα τοῦ βίου νειμάμεναι, παραχωρήσειάν τι ταῖς λοιπαῖς ἁπάσαις καὶ χρείαις καὶ πράξεσιν. Ὧν εἰ πάνυ πρός τινι γένοιο, χαλεπῶς ἂν εἰς αὐτὴν ὑπὸ τῆς μαντικῆς ὠφελοῖο· οὔτε γὰρ καιροῦ παντός, οὔτε τόπου παντὸς δέξασθαι κατασκευὴν τελετῆς οὔτε πᾶσα εὐμάρεια συμπεριφέρειν τὰ ἐπ' αὐτὴν ὄργανα.
>
> But as for the forms of foreknowledge that come to us through all manner of instruments (διὰ τῶν ποικίλων ὀργάνων), we must be content if, having occupied the greater part of life, they make some concession to its remaining needs and activities. If you were to give yourself up to any of these things, you would scarcely find divination of use to you for your purpose, for it is not every place or every season in which one can receive the equipment for the initiation, nor is there every facility for carrying about with you the necessary implements.
>
> *On Dreams* 12.3[27]

Dream divination, by contrast, was different: each person, Synesius says, is his own instrument: ἀλλὰ τῆς γε δι' ὀνείρων μαντικῆς αὐτός τίς ἐστιν ἕκαστος ὄργανον (*On Dreams* 12.5). In this he echoes Plato's statement in *Republic* VII that

> τὸ δ' ἔστιν οὐ πάνυ φαῦλον ἀλλὰ χαλεπὸν πιστεῦσαι, ὅτι ἐν τούτοις τοῖς μαθήμασιν ἑκάστου ὄργανόν τι ψυχῆς ἐκκαθαίρεταί τε καὶ ἀναζωπυρεῖται ἀπολλύμενον καὶ τυφλούμενον ὑπὸ τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιτηδευμάτων, κρεῖττον ὂν σωθῆναι μυρίων ὀμμάτων· μόνῳ γὰρ αὐτῷ ἀλήθεια ὁρᾶται.
>
> there is in every soul an instrument that is purified and kindled afresh by such studies when it has been destroyed and blinded by our ordinary pursuits, a faculty whose preservation outweighs ten thousand eyes; for by it alone is truth beheld.
>
> *Resp.* 527de[28]

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27 Jacques Lamoureux, ed. *Synésios de Cyrène. Tome IV, Opuscules, I* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2004); trans. adapted from Augustine Fitzgerald, *The Essays and Hymns of Synesius of Cyrene, Including the Address to the Emperor Arcadius and the Political Speeches*, vol. 2 (London: Oxford University Press, 1930).

28 Trans. adapted from Paul Shorey, *Plato: The Republic*, vol. 2, LCL (1935).

The context is significant, for the statement occurs in the midst of a discussion of the branches of knowledge best suited for the perception of reality, including arithmetic, plane and solid geometry, and astronomy. As is clear from the discussion of astronomy, the point is not to use these sciences to perceive material reality, but rather a higher reality, intelligible rather than sensible (529cd).

In his study of solid geometry in the *Republic*, Chiye Izumi has suggested that Plato's reference to the soul as an instrument reflects the dispute he was reported by Plutarch to have had with Archytas of Tarentum over the use of mechanical instruments in the doubling of a cube.[29] Whether Plutarch's report reflects an actual dispute between the two philosophers or, more likely, a "later tradition" about the origin of mechanics, the connection is worth examining.[30] The view of divinatory instruments taken by Neoplatonists such as Synesius is clearly related to the more general question of how mechanical instruments might or might not be used in the search for truth.

As Plutarch explains in his *Marcellus*, Plato found fault with Archytas and other mathematicians for using "mechanical models" (ὀργανικῶν παραδειγμάτων) and "mechanical constructions" (ὀργανικὰς … κατασκευάς) to solve problems such as doubling the cube (*Marc.* 14.5, trans. Huffman). The science of mechanics was invented, he says,

> ἐπεὶ δὲ Πλάτων ἠγανάκτησε καὶ διετείνατο πρὸς αὐτούς ὡς ἀπολλύντας καὶ διαφθείροντας τὸ γεωμετρίας ἀγαθόν, ἀπὸ τῶν ἀσωμάτων καὶ νοητῶν ἀποδιδρασκούσης ἐπὶ τὰ αἰσθητά, καὶ προσχρωμένης αὖθις αὖ σώμασι πολλῆς καὶ φορτικῆς βαναυσουργίας δεομένοις
>
> when Plato was upset and maintained against them that they were destroying and ruining the value of geometry, since it had fled from the incorporeal and intelligible to the sensible, using again physical objects (σώμασι) which required much common handicraft.
>
> *Marc.* 14.6, ed. and trans. HUFFMAN

In another treatise, Plutarch relates the same dispute, and paraphrases *Republic* VII (527de):

29 Chiye Izumi, "The Role of Stereometry in Plato's *Republic*," *PLATO: The Electronic Journal of the International Plato Society* 11 (2011), n. 10: http://gramata.univ-paris1.fr/Plato/article102.html.

30 Carl A. Huffman, *Archytas of Tarentum: Pythagorean, Philosopher, and Mathematician King* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 384.

> [ἡ διάνοια] ἐθιζομένη γὰρ ὑπὸ τοῦ σφόδρα πονεῖν καὶ ἥδεσθαι τῷ περὶ τὰ σώματα πλανητῷ καὶ μεταβλητῷ προσέχειν ὡς ὄντι τοῦ ἀληθῶς ὄντος τυφλοῦται, καὶ τὸ 'μυρίων' ἀντάξιον 'ὀμμάτων' ὄργανον ψυχῆς καὶ φέγγος ἀπόλλυσιν, ᾧ μόνῳ θεατόν ἐστι τὸ θεῖον.
>
> Being habituated, through the experience of intense pain and pleasure, to paying heed to the shifting and changeable aspects of physical things, as though they were true being, the understanding is blinded to truth and loses that organ – that light within the mind, worth 'thousands of eyes,' by which alone the divine may be contemplated.
>
> *Quaest. conv.* 8.2.1[31]

It is this view, in which material instruments are seen as lowly and banausic, and the soul is considered the only proper instrument of truth, that Synesius reflects in his treatise on dreams. Truth is what matters in divination, and for those who shared Plutarch's interpretation of Plato, it could not be achieved through material instruments.

In addition to his doubts about the truth-producing qualities of the instruments themselves, Synesius also objected to the way in which such instruments, at least metaphorically, could be thought to exert pressure on the divine:

> Πρὸς οὖν τῷ σχέτλιον εἶναι συγκύπτειν εἰς τὰ τοιάδε, ὡς ἔγωγε πείθομαι, καὶ ἀπηχθημένον θεῷ· τὸ γὰρ μὴ ἐθελοντὴν περιμένειν ὀντινοῦν, ἀλλ' ὠθισμῷ καὶ μοχλείᾳ κινεῖν, ὅμοιόν ἐστι βιαζομένοις, ὃ μηδ' ἐπ' ἀνθρώπων γενόμενον ὁ νομοθέτης εἴασεν ἀτιμώρητον.
>
> Thus, in addition to the baseness of stooping to such practices, it is, I am persuaded, also a course hateful to God. For not to await voluntarily any one's coming, but to set him moving by pressure and leverage, this is like the employment of force, a thing which even when it has happened among men, the legislator has not allowed to pass unpunished.
>
> *On Dreams* 12.4, trans. adapted from FITZGERALD

Such a view was familiar in Neoplatonic circles, particularly in the context of debates about the propriety and value of theurgy. Already in the late third century Porphyry had raised similar questions in his now-lost *Letter to Anebo*,

31 Text and trans. Edwin L. Minar, *Moralia*, vol. 9, LCL (1961).

known only by fragments cited by later authors.[32] As reported by Iamblichus in his *Response to Porphyry*:

> Ζητεῖς δὲ τὸ λοιπὸν περὶ τοῦ τρόπου τῆς μαντείας τίς τέ ἐστι καὶ ὁποῖος, ὃν ἤδη μὲν ἡμεῖς κοινῇ τε καὶ κατ' ἰδίαν ἐξηγησάμεθα, σὺ δὲ πρῶτον μὲν ἀποφαίνῃ γνώμην τῶν μάντεων, ὡς πάντες διὰ θεῶν ἢ δαιμόνων φασὶ τοῦ μέλλοντος τυγχάνειν τῆς προγνώσεως, οὐδὲ οἷόν τε ἄλλους εἰδέναι αὐτὸ ἢ μόνους τοὺς τῶν ἐσομένων κυρίους. Ἔπειτα ἀπορεῖς εἰ ἄχρι τοσούτου κατάγεται εἰς ὑπηρεσίαν ἀνθρώπων τὸ θεῖον ὡς μὴ ὀκνεῖν τινας καὶ ἀλφιτομάντεις εἶναι.
>
> But you seek further concerning "the manner of divination, what it is and what kind of thing it is," which we have already explained, both in general and in particular. And first you declare the attitude of the diviners, "how all say that they attain foreknowledge of the future through gods or daemons, and that it is impossible for others to know it, or only for those who are masters over the future." Then you raise the question whether the divine is brought down for the service of human beings, to the extent that some do not hesitate even to be diviners by barley meal.
>
> *Response to Porphyry* 3.17[33]

Porphyry's point here is to question a view of the gods that would have them involved in so low an operation, and especially one that would subject them to human coercion.[34] He is not mainly concerned, at least in this passage, with the use of instruments. Another passage, however, suggests that the problem of instruments may have formed a more prominent theme in Porphyry. Found in the *Hypomnesticon* of Joseph, a compilation of Christian biblical learning likely written in the later fourth or early fifth century, the passage (fr. 43) consists

32 A full account can be found in the new edition by Henri Dominique Saffrey and Alain-Philippe Segonds, *Porphyre: Lettre à Anébon l'Égyptien* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 2012). Translations of Poprhyry's *Letter* and Iamblichus's *Response* are taken, sometimes with slight modifications, from the translation of Emma C. Clarke, John M. Dillon, and Jackson P. Hershbell, *Iamblichus: De Mysteriis*, WGRW 4 (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2003).

33 Fr. 44 Saffrey and Segonds.

34 The subject appears elsewhere in the *Letter to Anebo*; e.g., in frr. 73, 75, 65q, 65r, 65s Saffrey. See further, Aaron P. Johnson, *Religion and Identity in Porphyry of Tyre: The Limits of Hellenism in Late Antiquity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 75–83; Crystal Addey, *Divination and Theurgy in Neoplatonism: Oracles of the Gods* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), 136–38.

of a long list of Greek divination practices.[35] Among the forms of divination in the list are some later mentioned by Iamblichus, including divination by lots (ἡ διὰ κλήρων, 7; ἡ διὰ λαχῶν, 10), knuckle-bones (ἡ δι᾽ ἀστραγάλων, 8), barley flour (οἱ δὲ δι᾽ ἀλφίτων, 43), stones (διὰ λίθων, 48), and divinatory urns and pebbles (διὰ καλπίδων <καὶ> ψήφων, 57). If in fact Joseph drew this array of divinatory instruments from the *Letter to Anebo*, as seems likely, it was then to Porphyry's list that Iamblichus alluded when he sought to endorse even the meanest of instruments used in divination:

> εἰ δὲ καὶ ἄχρι τῶν ἀψύχων οἷον ψηφιδίων ἢ ῥάβδων ἢ ξύλων τινῶν ἢ λίθων ἢ πυρῶν ἢ ἀλφίτων διήκει τῇ προδηλώσει, αὐτὸ τοῦτο καὶ τὸ θαυμασιώτατόν ἐστι τῆς θείας μαντικῆς προσημασίας, διότι καὶ τοῖς ἀψύχοις ψυχὴν καὶ τοῖς ἀκινήτοις κίνησιν ἐνδίδωσι, ποιεῖ τε πάντα σαφῆ καὶ γνώριμα καὶ λόγου μετέχοντα καὶ ἀφωρισμένα τοῖς τῆς νοήσεως μέτροις, καίτοι μηδένα λόγον ἔχοντα ἀφ᾽ ἑαυτῶν.
>
> But if this divine power extends in its predictions to inanimate objects, such as little pebbles, branches, or certain woods, stones, wheat, and barley meal, this is itself the most astonishing prognostication by divine divination, because it gives life to inanimate things and motion to things motionless, and makes all clear, knowledgeable, and participating in reason, and definable according to the measures of intelligence, and yet having no reason in themselves.
>
> *Response to Porphyry* 3.17

This is the clearest endorsement in antiquity of the value of instruments in divination. It is particularly valuable here for its focus on lot divination. To be sure, divination by wheat and by barley flour need not have involved sortilege. These divinatory methods, although well enough attested, are not well understood.[36] They belong to a complex of techniques involving both

35 On the attribution of the fragment to Porphyry, see Henri Dominique Saffrey, "Porphyre dans La Patrologie de Migne: Sur la divination," in *Le Néoplatonisme après Plotin*, ed. Henri Dominique Saffrey (Paris, 2000), 27–36. The authorship of the work is disputed. For an English translation with Greek text, notes, and introduction, see Robert M. Grant and Glen W. Menzies, *Joseph's Bible Notes* (*Hypomnestikon*) (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996).

36 The best accounts remain those of Ryszard Ganszenyiec [Richard Ganschinietz] in Pauly-Wissowa: "Ἀλευρομαντεία," *PW* Suppl. III (1918), cols. 78–79; "Ἀλφιτομαντεία," *PW* Suppl. III (1918), col. 86; "Τυρομάντεις," *PW* Suppl. III (1918), col. 866; and "Krithomanteia," *PW* XI.2 (1922), col. 1900. For Babylonian examples, see Jean Nougayrol, "Aleuromancie babylonienne," *Orientalia* N.S. 32 (1963): 381–86. I am grateful to Gil Renberg for this and other references to Babylonian divination by meal.

whole and ground wheat and barley that may originally have had to do with sacrifice, as Ryszard Ganszenyiec argued in 1918.[37] Divination by wheat flour was singled out for special criticism in anti-divinatory treatises of the second century, perhaps because of associations with Apollo's oracle at Delphi,[38] and this objection seems to have been applied to the whole genre. In his list of types of μάντεις, Pollux lists diviners by wheat flour (ἀλευρομάντεις) and barley flour (ἀλφιτομάντεις) along with "astrologers (ἀστρομάντεις), diviners by night (νυκτομάντεις), belly-talkers (στερνομάντεις), and spindle-diviners (σφονδυλομάντεις)," a grouping that offers no obvious hints about the technique used.[39] Ganszenyiec suggested that answers may have been obtained from ground wheat and barley by examining the quality of the meal, the presence of organic or inorganic impurities, or (also applicable to divination by the whole grain) by the patterns it made when thrown into a fire.[40] Babylonian parallels suggest that the meal may have been strewn over a river.[41] Some of these methods could qualify as sortilege.

Whatever we conclude about the methods employed by barley flour diviners and their kin, the other methods mentioned by Iamblichus – divination by small pebbles, stones, and branches and certain woods – most certainly did represent forms of lot divination. Drawing upon the list preserved in the *Hypomnesticon*, we can expand on Iamblichus's brief mention of "little pebbles" and "stones" with reference to Joseph's (i.e., Porphyry's) fuller and more precise descriptions of these methods:

> Πολλὰ δὲ ἐν πλείοσι ναοῖς καὶ διὰ καλπίδων <καὶ> ψήφων ἀποκρινόντων συνέστη μαντεῖα τοῦ νεωκόρου τὴν ψῆφον ἐφορῶντος καὶ ἀπὸ βιβλίου τὸν χρησμὸν ἀναγινώσκοντος (57).
>
> In a large number of temples, many oracles give responses by means of urns and pebbles: the temple warden chooses the pebble and reads out the response from a book.

37 Ganschinietz, "Ἀλευρομαντεία," cols. 78–79.

38 Hesychius, s.v. ἀλευρόμαντις (α 2903, ed. Latte): ὁ Ἀπόλλων διὰ τὸ καὶ ἐν ἀλεύροις μαντεύεσθαι. See further Oenomaus of Gadara, fr. 7 Hammerstaedt and Clement of Alexandria, *Protr* 11.2.

39 Pollux, *Onom.* VII.188, ed. E. Bethe (Teubner, 1967).

40 Ganschinietz, "Ἀλευρομαντεία," cols. 78–79.

41 A. R. George and F. N. H. Al-Rawi, "Tablets from the Sippar Library VI. Atra-ḫasīs," *Iraq* 58 (1996): 147–90, at 173–74.

διὰ λίθων τοῖς στοιχείοις προσρασσόντων εν Αἰγύπτῳ (48).

[Divination] through stones dashing against the letters, in Egypt.

Both methods involved writing. In the first, pebbles are used to select appropriate responses from a book of lots, and in the second, stones are used to select individual letters, possibly through a procedure not unlike that used in the divination session described by Ammianus Marcellinus (29.1.29–31).

Iamblichus's reference to "branches and certain woods" fits well with what we know more generally of ῥαβδομαντεία, a broad category of lot divination involving the use of any kind of cutting from a tree, including Apollo's laurel and Zeus's oak. This category also included varieties of divination from non-Greek and non-Roman regions such as Scythia (Herodotus), Gaul and Germany (Tacitus), and the Near East.[42]

Iamblichus's purpose in introducing these objects was of course intended to make a much larger point about the use of material objects in theurgy; divination was simply the best available illustration.[43] But what he says about the philosophical logic for theurgy can equally well be taken to explain the divinatory example as well:

Δῆλον δὴ οὖν διὰ πάντων τῶν εἰρημένων καὶ τοῦτο γέγονεν, ὡς ὀργάνοις μέσοις πολλοῖς οἱ θεοὶ χρώμενοι τὰ σημεῖα τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἐπιπέμπουσι, δαιμόνων τε ὑπηρεσίαις καὶ ψυχῶν καὶ τῆς φύσεως ὅλης χρώμενοι πᾶσί τε τοῖς περὶ τὸν κόσμον ἐκείνοις ἀκολουθοῦσι, κατὰ μίαν ἀρχὴν ἐξηγούμενοι καὶ ἀνέντες τὴν ἀπ' αὐτῶν κατιοῦσαν κίνησιν, ὅπῃπερ ἂν ἐθέλωσιν. Αὐτοὶ δὴ οὖν χωριστοὶ πάντων <καὶ> ἀπολελυμένοι τῆς σχέσεως καὶ συντάξεως τῆς πρὸς τὴν γένεσιν ἄγουσι πάντα ἐν τῇ γενέσει καὶ φύσει κατὰ τὴν οἰκείαν βούλησιν.

Indeed, this becomes clear from everything said, namely, that the gods, through the use of many intermediate instruments, send forth signs to human beings, using not only the services of daemons, but also those of souls and of all nature and all things in the cosmos which obey these, guiding them according to a single principle, and allowing their own motion to proceed from them in whatever way they wish. Indeed, then, while being transcendent over all things and free from every relationship and co-ordination with those in the realm of becoming, they lead

42 Wilhelm Gundel, "Ῥαβδομαντεία," *PW*, 2nd series, 1.1 (1914), cols. 13–18.

43 Gregory Shaw, *Theurgy and the Soul: The Neoplatonism of Iamblichus*, 2nd ed. (Kettering, OH: Angelico, 2014), 146–52.

> everything in the realm of generation and nature in accordance with their own will. (3.16)

By maintaining that what seemed to be the human use of instruments was in fact a divine use of instruments, Iamblichus was able to answer the objection that instruments could be used to force the gods to act on human desires. He pointed out that far from constraining the gods, those who truly divined, for instance in places like Delphi and Didyma, prepared for it by pious actions, including prayer, fasting, sacrifice, and purification (3.11). Such diviners were the very opposite of those who divined without proper preparation, for example, those standing on magical *charactēres*:

> Εἰσὶ γάρ τινες οἳ τὴν ὅλην πραγματείαν τῆς τελεσιουργοῦ θεωρίας παριδόντες περί τε τὸν καλοῦντα καὶ περὶ τὸν ἐπόπτην, τάξιν τε τῆς θρησκείας καὶ τὴν ὁσιωτάτην ἐν πολλῷ χρόνῳ τῶν πόνων ἐμμονὴν ἀτιμάσαντες, θεσμούς τε καὶ ἐντυχίας καὶ τὰς ἄλλας ἁγιστείας παρωσάμενοι, ἀποχρῶσαν νομίζουσι τὴν ἐπὶ τῶν χαρακτήρων μόνην στάσιν καὶ ταύτην ἐν μιᾷ ὥρᾳ ποιησάμενοι εἰσκρίνειν νομίζουσί τι πνεῦμα.
>
> For there are some who overlook the whole procedure of effective contemplation, both in regard to the one who makes an invocation and the one who enjoys the vision; and they disdain the order of the sacred observance, its holiness and long-protracted endurance of toils, and, rejecting the customs, prayers and other rituals, they believe the simple standing on the *charactēres* to be sufficient, and when they have done this for a mere hour, they believe that they have caused some spirit to enter. (3.13)

The valorization of instruments promoted by Iamblichus came at a cost, however, to the professional status of diviners. When understood as divine, divinatory instruments could not be represented as the ordinary implements of professional skill, like a surveyor's *groma* or surgeon's scalpel. Such an interpretation was only possible if, like Maximus of Tyre, one considered divine knowledge as continuous with human:

> θεοῦ δὲ μαντεία καὶ ἀνθρώπου νοῦς… χρῆμα συγγενές, καὶ εἴπερ τι ἄλλο ἄλλῳ ὅμοιον, οὐδὲν ἂν εἴη ἐμφερέστερον ἀρετῆς ἀνθρωπίνης γνώμῃ θεοῦ. μὴ τοίνυν ἀπόρει μηθ' ὅντινα τρόπον τὸ αὐτεξούσιον τῆς ἀνθρωπίνης γνώμης χρῆται μαντικῇ, μήθ' ὅπως ἀληθευούσης τῆς μαντικῆς δύναταί τι καὶ ἀνθρώπου γνώμη· περὶ γὰρ ὁμοίου πράγματος σκοπεῖς.

> Divine prophetic powers and human intellect … are kindred faculties; if anything at all resembles anything else, then there is nothing more similar to divine intellect than human excellence. Cease then to wonder both how autonomous human intellect finds a use for prophecy, and how conversely the validity of prophecy leaves a role for human intellect. these are similar phenomena that you are considering.
>
> *Oration* 13.2[44]

In such cases, Maximus reasons, ship captains, generals, and doctors displayed prognostic skills akin to those used in divination, and instruments could be considered appropriate anywhere along the spectrum. κάλει τοίνυν τεχνίτην μὲν τὸν θεόν, ὄργανα δὲ τοὺς λογισμοὺς τοὺς ἀνθρωπίνους, τέχνην δὲ τὴν μαντικὴν σπῶσαν ἡμᾶς ἐπὶ τὴν ἀγωγὴν τῆς εἱμαρμένης, "Call the mechanic God, the machines human powers of reasoning, and the mechanic's technical knowledge the prophetic art which draws us to follow the guidance of Fate" (*Oration* 13.4, trans. Trapp). For those who, like Iamblichus, emphasized the discontinuity between human and divine knowledge (3.26, 10.3), instruments could only be understood as the media of divine intervention in the world. This view of instruments made the diviner who used them more like a recipient of inspiration than a skilled practitioner, as Iamblichus confirmed by his rejection of divination by skill: "it is not even set in motion by a skill acquired from without, one concerned exclusively with some aspect of human existence" (ἀλλ' οὐδ' ἀπὸ τέχνης τινὸς ἔξωθεν ἐπικτήτου περί τι μέρος τῶν ἐν τῷ βίῳ διαπραγματευομένης, 3.1). By effacing the difference between inspired and technical divination upheld by Cicero and other theorists, his arguments had the effect either of requiring lot diviners to be inspired or of eliminating the need for them altogether.

We are not able here to explore all the effects that this understanding of lot divination had on later theories of its operation. But it is instructive to note its reception by a later Neoplatonist, Augustine of Hippo, if only to point to its potential for shaping the practice of lot divination in a Christian world. In a sermon he delivered shortly before his ordination in 394, at a time when he still endorsed some forms of Christian divination, Augustine surveyed the ways in which God could communicate with mankind:

> Multi autem modi sunt, quibus nobiscum loquitur deus. Loquitur aliquando per aliquod instrumentum, sicut per codicem divinarum scripturarum. Loquitur per aliquod elementum mundi, sicut per stellam magis

44 Text and trans. Michael B. Trapp, *Maximus of Tyre: The Philosophical Orations* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1997).

> locutus est.... Loquitur per sortem, sicut de Mathia in locum Iudae ordinando, locutus est. Loquitur per animam humanam, sicut per prophetam. Loquitur per angelum, sicut patriarcharum et prophetarum et apostolorum quibusdam locutum esse accipimus. Loquitur per aliquam vocalem sonantemque creaturam, sicut de caelo voces factas, cum oculis nullus videretur, legimus et tenemus. Ipsi denique homini, non extrinsecus per aures eius aut oculos, sed intus in animo non uno modo deus loquitur, sed aut in somnis ... aut spiritu hominis assumpto, quam graeci extasin vocant ... aut in ipsa mente, cum quisque maiestatem vel voluntatem intellegit.
>
> Now there are many ways in which God speaks with us. At times he speaks through an instrument, as through a codex of the divine scriptures. He speaks through a heavenly body, as he spoke to the Magi through a star.... He speaks through a lot, just as he spoke concerning the choice of Matthias in place of Judas. He speaks through the human soul, as through a prophet. He speaks through an angel, just as we understand him to have spoken to certain patriarchs and prophets and apostles. He speaks through a creature endowed with speech and sound, just as we read and believe of voices produced from the heavens, although no one is visible to the eye. Finally God speaks directly to a person, not externally through the ears or eyes, but internally in the soul, and not in one way only, but in dreams ... or with a person's spirit lifted up, which the Greeks call *ecstasis* ... or in the mind itself, when each person understands his majesty and his will.[45]

As I have pointed out elsewhere,[46] Augustine makes no mention of diviners here and in fact consistently objects to their activities. But he does authorize the availability of divine knowledge that they promised. Like Iamblichus, while rejecting diviners, Augustine approves of their instruments – a codex of the scriptures or a lot – and so maintains the compatibility of a divinatory economy with divine transcendence. This was the same balance Iamblichus maintained at the start of the fourth century. And while in succeeding centuries this view helped to close off one avenue of divinatory authority – qualification by

45 Augustine, *Serm.* 12.4 (CCSL 41:167–68). For the date, see Pierre-Patrick Verbraken, *Études critiques sur les sermons authentiques de Saint Augustin*, Instrumenta Patristica 12 (The Hague: Nijhoff, 1976), 55.

46 William E. Klingshirn "Divination and the Disciplines of Knowledge according to Augustine," in *Augustine and the Disciplines: From Cassiciacum to Confessions*, ed. Karla Pollmann and Mark Vessey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 113–40, at 115–16.

professional skill – if only very gradually, it opened up another more in keeping with Christian preferences. Henceforth, it was increasingly by contact with the Christian sources of sacred power – the cross, martyrs' relics, the scriptures, prayers to Christ and his saints – that diviners would gain the trust of their clients and attain to what Iamblichus had called "the truth that divination needs" (ἀλήθειαν… ἧς δεῖ τῇ μαντικῇ, 3.1). In the surviving Christian texts we can see, alongside the range of interpretations they offered, the ultimate ground of their confidence: God's willingness to share divine knowledge with humankind. The anonymous diviner who composed the preface to a tenth-century copy of the *Sortes Sanctorum* understood this well:

> Haec sunt sortes sanctorum que numquam conturbant, neque trepidos in errorem convertunt sed sicut fabri solent ex utraque parte acuere ferrum, sic sortes, iustos et minus perfectos undique. Quando sortire vis, dic: Pater noster. Ego autem in te speravi, domine. Dixi: 'Deus meus es tu, in manibus tuis sortes meae.'
>
> These are the lots of the saints that never disturb, nor turn the fearful to error, but just as workers sharpen a sword on each side, so these lots [sharpen] the just and the imperfect everywhere. When you want to cast lots, say: "Our Father [i.e., the Lord's Prayer]. *I have placed my hope in you, Lord. I have said 'You are my God, my lots are in your hands'.*
>
> Psalm 30:15–16[47]

It was thus that the instruments of lot divination – the lots themselves in God's hands – could render God's truth to those who sought to do his will, on earth as it was in heaven.

47 Madrid, B.N. MS 3307, fol. 34v. See the 2004 and 2013 editions by Enrique Montero Cartelle: *Los "libros de suertes" medievales: las "Sortes sanctorum" y los "Prenostica Socratis basilei": estudio, traducción y edición crítica* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2004); Cartelle, *Les sortes sanctorum: étude, édition critique et traduction*, Textes littéraires du Moyen Âge 27, Série Divinatoria 3 (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013).

CHAPTER 3

Fateful Spasms: Palmomancy and Late Antique Lot Divination

Salvatore Costanza

> By the pricking of my thumbs
> Something wicked this way comes.
>
> – WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

∴

Closely related to cleromancy was the science of palmomancy, the art of interpreting involuntary movements of the human body, such as twitches, tremors, and shakes (παλμοί, τρόμοι, σπασμοί).[1] The meaning of such unexpected and uncontrolled movements is expounded in Greek treatises preserved on papyri from the third and fourth centuries CE[2] as well as in medieval manuscripts and early printed books of the fourteenth through sixteenth centuries.[3] I have

1 On the notion of palmomancy, see Hermann Diels, *Die griechischen Zuckungsbücher* (*Melampus* Περὶ Παλμῶν), vol. 1 of *Beiträge zur Zuckungsliteratur des Okzidents und Orients*, APAW.PH 1907 IV (Berlin: Verlag der Königlichen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1908), 3–6; Samuel Grant Oliphant, "Salissationes sive ad Plaut. 'Milit.' 694," *AJP* 31 (1910): 203–6; Theodor Hopfner, "Palmoskopia," PW 18,3 (1949): 260–62; Charles-Emile Ruelle, "La palmomantique," *RevPhil* 32 (1908): 139–41; Phaidon Koukoules, Βυζαντινῶν βίος καὶ πολιτισμός, 6 vols. (Athens: Collection de l'Institut Français d'Athènes, 1948–1957), vol I.2, 185–89; Tomáš Vítek, "Palmické věštění," *Listy filologické* 129 (2006): 243–70; Salvatore Costanza, *Corpus Palmomanticum Graecum* (= *Papyrologica Florentina* 39) (Florence: Gonnelli, 2009), 5–7, hereafter cited as *CPG*; Costanza, *La divinazione greco-romana. Dizionario delle mantiche: metodi, testi e protagonisti* (Udine: Forum 2009), 135–37.

2 See Appendix 1 below for a list of palmomantic papyri collected and edited by Costanza, *CPG* 43–110, and further editions registered by Peter van Minnen, "A New Palmomantic Text," *APF* 62:1 (2016): 59–60, with mention of an unpublished quiver-text in the National Library of France (BnF Suppl. gr. 1385, 123).

3 For the palmomantic tradition in the Middle Ages and early Renaissance, see Diels, *Zuckungsliteratur*, 1:6–8; Diels, *Weitere griechische und außergriechische Literatur und Volksüberlieferung, Nachträge zum ersten Teil* (*Melampus*), vol. 2 of *Beiträge zur Zuckungsliteratur des Okzidents und Orients*, APAW.PH 1908 IV (Berlin: Verlag der Königlichen

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previously examined the history of these texts and their transmission, established comparisons between late antique papyri and the medieval tradition[4] (later demotic arrangements included[5]), and demonstrated that two versions (A and B) of an early text for twitch divination attributed to Melampous already circulated in Roman imperial times.[6] In this chapter, my analysis will be focused on the divinatory logic of palmomantic procedure, ruling principles and inner coherence of its practice in relation to ancient physiognomy, and further, on the expectations of clients and their own beliefs.

There is no need to emphasize the great importance of prophecy and related social phenomena in late antiquity with its political instability and new religious matters. In such a context it often happens that diviners, magicians, and fortune-tellers were sought for advice.[7]

In the imperial Roman period, the Greek papyri of Egypt give us detailed evidence about different kinds of divination. We owe to extant handbooks with practical instructions the chance of reading the very texts the adepts of occult sciences used to practice their mantic wisdom and to share it with everyone who was interested. To have these collections is to our considerable advantage, and proves that the book-trade and literacy, as we shall see, were at that time a chief feature of divination.

Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1909), 5–6; Costanza, *CPG*, 113–26. On medieval palmomancy, see Costanza, "La palmomanzia e tecniche affini in età bizantina," *Schede Medievali* 44 (2006): 106–11; Véronique Dasen and Jérôme Vilgaux, "De la palmomantique à l'éternuement, lectures divinatoires des mouvements du corps," *Kernos* 26 (2013): 114.

4 For palmomantic versions in the medieval tradition, see Diels, *Zuckungsliteratur*, 1:19–42 (A, B, C); Diels, *Zuckungsliteratur*, 2:7–9 (D); Costanza, *CPG*, 127–95. Palmomantic passages will be quoted according to the *CPG*.

5 Byzantine versions appear in the fragmentary Book of Wisdom: Palmomancy of the Persians (Athens, EBE, MS 1493, thirteenth century), the oldest manuscript on this subject, edited by Salvatore Costanza, "Due *incipit* palmomantici bizantini," *ByzZ* 100:2 (2007): 611; Costanza, *CPG*, 199–201; and in a more enigmatic Ps.-Pythagorean schema of bodily prognostics given in a plate of two columns in *Laur. Plut.* 28. 14, ed. Costanza, "Una *syntaxis* mantica pitagorica," *ByzZ* 98:1 (2005): 11–14; Costanza, *CPG*, 202–4.

6 Diels, *Zuckungsliteratur*, 2:10–11; Hunt, *Catalogue*, 58; Costanza, *CPG*, 113–17, 121; Appendix 1 below.

7 On the flourishing of divination in Athens during the Peloponnesian War, see John Dillery, "Chresmologues and Manteis: Independent Diviners and the Problem of Authority," in *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter T. Struck, RGRW 155 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 213–15; Ludwig Radermacher, "Euripides und die Mantik," *Rheinisches Museum* 53 (1898): 504–06; William V. Harris, *Dreams and Experience in Classical Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press: 2009): 134. On Thucydides' thought, see Simon Hornblower, "The Religious Dimension to the Peloponnesian War, or, what Thucydides does not tell us," *HSCP* 94 (1992): 169–72.

We begin by inquiring into the specialized language the authors of palmomantic treatises took pains to use. The significance of their method of interpreting twitches arises from the literary evidence now available, that is, from handbooks dealing with this topic that circulated in late antique Egypt.

A peculiar methodology was applied to interpret twitches. As many scholars have already noticed, divinatory experience very often interferes with scientific and particularly medical thought. This applies to the pseudo-science of human convulsions, whose texts denote a technical language drawn from descriptions of the human body and somehow imply a physiological notion of quivers.[8] These were, however, constituted for quite another aim, and palmomantic writers had not the least pretense to consciously state a scientific theory of spasms and similar movements.[9] For any twitch-book, the same basic framework recurs. Apart from specific differences in prophetic content, one set-formula can regularly be found in our handbooks: "If one member quivers, it indicates these facts" (ἐὰν τὸ μέλος τι ἅλληται, ταῦτα σημαίνει). That is, if such a bodily sign is shown, one thing will unavoidably happen. As we shall see in detail, twitch-interpreters may add to the basic structure of prognostications both individual prophecies and prayers to certain deities.

So, we can produce a schema for palmomantic response as follows, where a) and b) are necessary, constitutive parts, while b[1]) and c) additional, but somewhat valuable elements:[10]

a) Movement of a certain part of the human body;
b) General prophecy; b[1]) βίοι, i.e. individual prophecies.
c) Hilastic, i.e. propitiatory prayers.

We may also point out a regularly employed formula in Syriac treatises about palmomancy,[11] where the verb for quivering parts of the human body is *rafa*

8 Close similarities between palmomancy and science explain why P.Mich. XVIII 766 was first edited as a medical text by Susan Prince, "Medical Prognostics," in *P. Michigan Koenen* (= *P.Mich. XVIII*): *Michigan Texts Published in Honor of Ludwig Koenen*, ed. Cornelia E. Römer et al., Studia Amstelodamensia 36 Amsterdam: J. C. Gieben, 1996), 53–65, before it was recognized as a twitch-fragment by Rosario Pintaudi and Salvatore Costanza, "Frammento di un trattato di palmomanzia (*P. Mich.* XVIII 766)," *Analecta Papyrologica* 13 (2001): 77–80.

9 Such as we read in Galen, *On tremor*, 4, 7, 588 K. A theory of *palmos* with too selective a perspective is applied by Giuseppe Furlani, "Sur la palmomantique chez les Babyloniens et les Assyriens," *Archiv Orientální* 17 (1947): 259, and Vítek, "Palmické věštění," 247. Palmomancers present a far larger scope of movements; see Costanza, *CPG*, 6 n. 18.

10 For a similar schema of the structure of palmomantic prognostics, see Costanza, *CPG*, 6; Dasen and Vilgaux, "De la palmomantique," 115.

11 Giuseppe Furlani, "Due trattati palmomantici in siriaco," *Rendiconti Accademia Nazionale Lincei*, V, 26 (1917): 719–32, with editions of two twitch-books preserved in MS. Brit. Mus.

or *rafat* (see Akkadian *rabābu*, Arabic *raffa* < *rafafa*, Hebrew רפף used as a palmomantic *vox technica*)[12] just like ἅλλομαι or πάλλομαι in Greek twitch-books.[13]

Generally speaking, it should be assumed that if a spasm is observed somewhere on one's body, it denotes that the consequence applies to the same person. Here, we must remark that everybody is expected to be at the same time both the subject and the source of a palmomantic omen. In Hellenistic and Roman imperial times, diviners were believed to have devoted all their attention to studying the secret meanings of every existing thing and ascribing to them a predictive consequence, such as our handbooks do not fail to stress.[14] This type of semantic relation links bodily twitches as significant with respect to a predicted event, that is, various facts concerning one's private life or even the public sphere. A causal relation, as we can see, was inherent in the basics of divination, and readers of Greek treatises were likewise believers in the law of the direct consequence of signs, as a knowledge of the system of prediction had informed them.[15] A treatise was meant to offer an objective explanation of matters without wandering from the point.

This is the very nature of palmomancy, which directly concerns humans and their twitches considered to be the direct expression of divine will. Therefore, if someone was not in any way an expert in the rules of prognostication, he just needed to read the explanations on this subject that a diviner had previously

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Nestorian 2084, ff. 42r–45r of the eighteenth century, pp. 720–22, 723–25 respectively, and an attempt to restore a Greek original source; also Furlani, "Ancora un trattato palmomantico in lingua siriaca." *Rendiconti Accademia Nazionale Lincei*, v, 27.

12 For Hebrew and Arabic twitch-books, see Diels, *Zuckungsliteratur*, 2:58–91, 96–100. A short table on quiver-prognostications written in Garshuni (i.e. Arabic transliterated in the Syriac alphabet) is preserved in ms. Vat. Syr. 217, ff. 201v–202v, ed. Giuseppe Furlani, "Un trattato palmomantico in garsciunico," *Rivista di Studi Orientali* 21 (1946): 183–87. It lists sixty prophecies for the right side and fifty-nine for the left.

13 Furlani, "Due trattati," 730; Furlani, "Sur la palmomantique," 259, 267.

14 Although seemingly irrational, the interpretation of signs and omens by seers requires an eminently rational exercise by bypassing normal knowledge through supplementary, sympathetic ways of viewing the world and the place of man therein. See Jean-Pierre Vernant, "Speech and Mute Signs," in *Mortals and Immortals: Collected Essays*, ed. Jean-Pierre Vernant and Froma I. Zeitlin (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991), 308; Walter Burkert, "Signs, Commands, and Knowledge: Ancient Divination between Enigma and Epiphany," in Johnston et al., *Mantikê*, 30–31; Michael Attiah Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008): 13–14.

15 Once the homology of the universe was ascertained, the examination of signs was granted by a continuum of causality founded upon the Fate that enabled the performers to find their chance in order to establish a reciprocal, interactionist process of communication. See Sarah Iles Johnston, "Delphi and the Dead," in Johnston et al., *Mantikê*, 299; Richard Gordon, "Talking of Magic," in *Greek Magic: Ancient, Medieval and Modern*, ed. John C. B. Petropoulos (New York: Routledge, 2008), 148.

compiled. No doubt, the corpus of related papyri bears witness to the success of a method requiring nothing other than self-movements, since anyone could have examined them and interpreted their prognostic results by consulting a book on twitches, without the need to call upon the divinatory assistance of another person or a cultic, official institution. Temple professionals, on the other hand, were required to perform a sacrifice before activating hieroscopy, that is, prophecy by examining the entrails of slaughtered victims,[16] about which a corpus of late antique papyri is likewise attested.[17] The only necessary point to a palmomantic enquirer was, vice versa, that he could consult his treatise and orientate himself into its main principles, which required of him very basically to know how to read and write.[18]

Authors on twitches did not fail to help their readers find a response to their questions as easily and quickly as possible. Therefore, palmomantic papyri are regularly arranged so as to list the quivering parts of the human body *a capite ad calcem*, that is, from head to toe. From a compositional point of view, this is a procedure applied with no exception, as the editorial case of PSI VI 728 shows.[19] The same thing also happened in magic derived from astral iatromathematic

16 On sacrificial divination, see Alfred Lehmann, *Aberglaube und Zauberei von den ältesten Zeiten an bis in die Gegenwart* (Stuttgart: F. Enke 1898), 59–62, 75; William Reginald Halliday, *Greek Divination: A Study of its Methods and Principles* (London: Macmillan and Co., 1913; repr. Chicago: Argonaut, 1967), 186–90; Costanza, *La divinazione*, 102–5; Costanza, "I manuali su papiro di *observationes* divinatorie: applicazione e diffusione del sapere magico," in *Ecrire la magie dans l'Antiquité. Actes du colloque international*, ed. Magali de Haro Sanchez, Papyrologica Leodiensia 5 (Liège: Presses Universitaires, 2015), 173–76.

17 PSI X 1178 (= Pack² 2107) and P.Ross.Georg. I 21 (= Pack² 2108) from 2nd c. CE; P.Gen.inv. 161 (= Pack² 2106; LDAB 8895) from 2nd–3rd c. CE, recognized as fragments of an hepatoscopic tract by Salvatore Costanza, "P.Gen.inv. 161: un trattato di ieroscopia," *Analecta Papyrologica* 16/17 (2004–2005): 42–44; P.Amh. II 14 (=Pack² 2104) from 3rd–4th c. CE is our latest testimony, as no medieval manuscript tradition on this topic is available. See William Furley, Victor Gysembergh, *Reading the Liver: Papyrological Texts on Ancient Greek Extispicy*, STAC 94 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), who does not mention P.Gen. inv. 161.

18 We may assume at least some literacy among users of our papyri, unless they had someone (e.g. slaves) read prophecies to them. That seems unlikely, however. See Salvatore Costanza, "Il contributo dei papiri allo studio della divinazione greca," *Analecta Papyrologica* 26 (2014): 127.

19 First edited by Enrico Rostagno, *Papiri greci e latini della Società italiana*, no. 6 (Florence, 1920), 166–70, in three fragments (A, B, C), with an illogical enumeration of limbs and an incoherent repetition of entries on twitching eyes at lines 19–23 and 66–69. It was revised by Salvatore Costanza and Rosario Pintaudi, "PSI VI 728: frammenti di un codice di palmomanzia," *Analecta Papyrologica* 15 (2003) to correct its order. See Appendix 1 below.

and medical astrology.[20] We see the same arrangement of bodily limbs in love magic and exorcistic prayers, as well as in the *philtrokatadesmos*,[21] where two statuettes were employed as a coercive medium. In writing letters over the statuette representing his beloved woman, and piercing it with hairpins, the inquirer had equally to proceed from head to toe.[22] Magical formulae in exorcisms exhibit the same conception of the human body.[23]

Despite such a regular list, some bodily parts were more significant than others, given the apotropaic or magical meaning attributed to them. So, it evidently happened that a particular relevance was assigned to twitching eyes, buzzing ears, and shaking hands. According to magical thought, the eye had an active influence as a symbol of divine power over the everyday life of humans, whether propitious or not. The sensory means of vision were charged, therefore, with prophylactic powers, as eye-votives used as amulets attest.[24] Moreover, the look was considered a form of contact at a distance, and twitches of eyes were attributed to the peculiar symbolism of vision by ancient Greeks.[25] Generally speaking, the right eye was meant to be favorable, the left on the contrary unfavorable, as the first attestation of twitch-divination in Greek literature seems to confirm. We owe to Theocritus the most ancient depiction of a palmomantic procedure and it is perhaps not fortuitous that the Hellenistic poet mentions just the prophetic spasm of the eyebrow (*salissatio supercilii*),

20 The body was divided among twelve areas ruled by Zodiac houses, starting from Aries down to Pisces; Franz Cumont, "Les 'Prognostica de decubitu' attribués à Galien," *Bulletin Institut histoire belge de Rome* (1935): 126, with an excerpt of περὶ μελῶν in Ms. Laur. 28. 34 and 28. 13, which circulated in the Byzantine iatromathematical collection under Galen's name; Maria Papathanassiou, "Iatromathematica (Medical Astrology) in Late Antiquity and the Byzantine Period," *Medicina nei secoli* 11:2 (1999): 371–74.

21 Franz Boll, "Griechischer Liebeszauber aus Ägypten auf zwei Bleitafeln des Heidelberger archäologischen Instituts," *Sitzungsberichte der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften* (Heidelberg: Carl Winter's Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1910), 6–11; Dominic Montserrat, *Sex and Society in Graeco-Roman Egypt* (New York: T. J. Press, 1996), 188–99; Christopher A. Faraone, *Ancient Greek Love Magic* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 27–30, 94–95.

22 PGM IV 305 (cf. PGM II 6); Robert Walter Daniel and Franco Maltomini, eds., *Supplementum Magicum*, Papyrologica Coloniensia 16,1 (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990), 39; PGM IV 401–10.

23 See the prayer against demonic powers in Athens, EBE, MS 825, foll. 14v–15r; cf. Armand Delatte, *Textes grec inédits relatifs à l'histoire des religions*, vol. 1 of *Anecdota Atheniensia* (Liège: H. Vaillant-Carmanne, 1927), 240–41; Franco Maltomini, "P. Lond. 121 (= PGM VII), 1–221: Homeromanteion," *ZPE* 106 (1995): 115–20.

24 Waldemar Déonna, *Le symbolisme de l'œil* (Paris: E. de Boccard, 1965), 143–46, 148–53, 252–59.

25 Déonna, *Symbolisme*, 197–250, esp. 199 n. 7, where spasms of the eye and eyebrow are discussed in detail, but with no mention of palmomantic papyri.

in respect to the troubles of a goatherd in love: "My right eye is twitching. Lo there! Shall I be seeing her?"[26] Shudders of eyes and eyebrows were meant to be particularly important omens and were interpreted favorably or not, usually depending on their appearance on the right or left side of the face.[27]

For the peculiar significance of ears, we may recall buzzes (Greek ὤτων ἦχοι, Latin *tinnitus aurium*) discussed in twitch-handbooks because of their unpredictable character, and enumerated beside real spasmodic movements of limbs that palmomancers had first to take into account. On the grounds of prejudice that friends, relatives or outsiders talking about someone else in his absence were speaking ill of him and/or plotting against him,[28] a prophetic value was assigned to buzzing ears, especially in later versions of medieval tradition (C, D), with very little about this preserved in our papyri.[29] Subsequently, the *tinnitus* was meant to be an ill-omened presage of oncoming troubles.[30] Nonetheless, in version C a bipartite division was made between the notoriously unfavorable buzzing of the right ear and that favorable of the left.[31]

The hand was more than the main organ of touch and symbol of the human will and action; it was a figure of power, and played a far from minor role in

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26 Theocritus, *Idylls*, 3, 37–38; Salvatore Costanza, "L'indovino Melampo ed il manifesto palmomantico in Theocr. 3," *Eikasmos* 19 (2008): 127–28, 132–42.

27 For magical meaning and presuppositions of the opposition between the right and left side, see Eugène Monseur, "L'âme pupilline," *RHR* 50 (1905): 22 and 23 n. 1: the soul quivers and is frightened at the sight of wizard's evil eye. The twitching of the eye where a witch's soul appears becomes a presage of bad meetings, whereas the twitching of the other eye predicts a happy meeting. See Déonna, *Symbolisme*, 30, 199, with ethnological parallels.

28 It is a frequent folk-motif. For Graeco-Roman imperial literature: see Pliny, *Nat.* 28, 24; Lucian, *Dial. Meretr.* 9, 2; Statius, *Silvae* 4, 4, 26; Fronto, *Letter* 126, 15–6; Aristaenetus, *Letters*, 2, 13. Cf. Fritz Boehm, "Hydromanteia," in *PW* 9,1 (1914): 81, with evidence of Greek magical papyri; Anna Tiziana Drago, "Il "lamento della donna abbandonata" o lo stravolgimento parodico della tradizione: Aristaenet. Ep. 2, 13," *Materiali & Discussioni* 41 (1988): 208–10; Costanza, *La divinazione*, 133–34, s. v. 'otomanzia'; Costanza "'Les oreilles ont dû Vous tinter.' Fortune littéraire d'un thème folklorique de Lucien à Proust," *RLC* 3 (2015): 257–68.

29 There are no entries on ears in extant palmomantic papyri apart from PSI VI 728, ll. 23–24. See Costanza, *CPG*, 68, where prognostications are entirely lost in the lacuna, but the mention of quivering right and left ears proves that such a spasm was already recognized in late antiquity.

30 Thus for buzzing ears, D 6 predicts with no distinction ὦτα πάλλοντα, ζημίαν σημαίνουσιν. A very negative value is given to the tingling of both ears in I. Gončarov, *A Common story* (*Obykovennaja Istorija*, 1847), with reference to protagonist Aleksandr Fëdoryč's difficult love-story with Naden'ka; see Costanza, "Les oreilles," 258.

31 The *tinnitus* is ill-omened for only the right ear in C 6 (εἰ δὲ ἠχήσῃ λύπην σημαίνει), while it is propitious for the left in C 7 (τὸ δὲ εὐώνυμον εἴτε ἅλληται εἴτε ἠχήσῃ, πολλὰ ἀγαθὰ σημαίνει).

twitch divination.[32] Here, we need to take into account how the interpretation of spasms in this part of the body could conflict with another divinatory method such as chiromancy, founded upon the examination of lines, wrinkles and every peculiarity of the hand (χείρ) that in medieval times was similarly a special branch of physiognomy.[33] For example, some entries in version A assign planetary deities to rule over quivering fingers. The same sympathetic notion very likely recurs in a medieval chiromantic tract:[34] this is a corollary of the main idea of *melothesia*, the doctrine of astrological entities, like planets or zodiac signs, ruling over parts of the human body.[35] We may investigate how many ideas these two methods – chirology and palmoscopy – have drawn from the common sources of occult lore (see Appendix 3).

Once this is ascertained, we must keep the above-named techniques in two very distinct categories of prophecy, one devoted to palm reading, and another deployed in order to consider all human quivering limbs. It would be erroneous

32 On the meaning of quivering hands see Karl Gross (posthumous), *Menschenhand und Gotteshand in Antike und Christentum*, ed. Wolfgang Speyer (Stuttgart: Anton Hiersemann Verlag, 1985), 300–2, and 354–57 on eastern and Jewish depictions of God's hand.

33 The history of modern chiromancy is vague until the sixteenth century. For its earlier documents see Agrippa von Nettesheim, *De incertitudine et vanitate scientiae* (Cologne, 1584), cap. XXXV; John Brand, *Observations on Popular Antiquities: including the whole of Mr. Bourne's Antiquitates vulgares, with addenda to every chapter of that work* (London, 1777) 637–41; Gustav W. Gessmann, *Katechismus der Handlesekunst* (Berlin 1889); Lehmann, *Aberglaube*, 180–82, 208, 219–22; Gross, *Menschenhand*, 291–95.

34 Under the title Προγνωστικὸν ἀπὸ τῶν ἐν τῇ παλάμῃ γραμμῶν, transmitted in Erlang. 89 (fifteenth century), fol. 192v–196, ed. Franz Boll, *Catalogus codicum astrologorum graecorum* VII (Bruxelles: Lamertin 1908), 236–44. This hand-tract is also to be read in Laur. 28, 13, fol. 17r; see Lehmann, *Aberglaube*, 180–82; Costanza, *CPG*, 36–38. Note that Ms. Erlang. 89, foll. 197–208 must be linked with a palmomantic codex such as Laur. 28, 14 (version C) with respect to the Sortes Astrampsychi, and is to be genealogically grouped together with Marc. Gr. 324; see Randall Stewart, "The Textual Transmission of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*," *Illinois Classical Studies* 20 (1995): 143; Stewart, ed., *Sortes Astrampsychi* (München and Leipzig: Teubner 2001), xi-xiii.

35 On the rule of planetary and zodiac gods over the body parts of human beings, see Theodor Hopfner, *Griechisch-ägyptischer Offenbarungszauber. Seine Methoden*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: H. Haessel, 1921, 1924), 2:629; A. Bouché-Leclercq, *L'astrologie grecque* (Paris, Léroux: 1899), 319–26; Franz Cumont, "Prognostica de decubitu," 119–21, 129–30; Wilhelm Gundel and Hans Georg Gundel, *Astrologumena. Die astrologische Literatur in der Antike und ihre Geschichte* (Wiesbaden: Steiner 1966), 30–33; Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology* (New York: Routledge 1994), 189–90; Papathanassiou, "Iatromathematica," 363–66; Christophe Chandezon, Véronique Dasen, and Jérôme Vilgaux, "Dream Interpretation, Physiognomy, Body Divination," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 306, 308.

to muddle the ideas and to label palmomancy as chiromantic lore,[36] such a mistake being strongly influenced by the English use of the term 'palmistry,' from medieval Latin *palmistria*,[37] as a current synonym for hand reading.[38] Among modern well-known literary examples attesting to such a belief, it is enough to recall famous passages concerning the spasm of fingers, as found in Shakespeare's *Macbeth*,[39] and Molière's *The Imaginary Invalid*.[40]

Since tremors were to be observed and counted as prognostic signs, someone could think that the audience for subsequent lists of παλμοί was predominantly made up of high-strung people, or rather, neurotics, who often had a fit of nerves, abruptly beginning to shudder and violently shake. But even establishing this general, heuristic principle provides no full understanding of such a phenomenon. Generally speaking, a shudder or shake was a peculiarly unforeseeable event that could have happened to anyone at any time. As we have already noted, this was the inevitable prerequisite for the palmomantic system itself. Thus, a superstitious man, like the one Theophrastus masterfully depicted, concentrated on such a sign and worried every time about its import. He could have been just the person who always wanted to have his own palmomantic handbook within reach. Documents like P.Ryl. I 28 (7,5 × 6,6 cm) may well confirm this point. This almost square codex, which could fit into one's pocket, may have been exactly what was needed 'on the spot.' In addition to its size and shape, P.Ryl. I 28 is interesting for its style of handwriting, a biblical

36 Thus we have to reject the mischievous definitions given recently in relation to our twitch-papyri by Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 134 ("palmomancy, the art of reading hands"), 135 ("palm-reading"), whereas no dream-book is represented among the Graeco-Egyptian papyri. Palmomantic papyri have nothing to do with hand reading, but merely give interpretations by quivering limbs. See Costanza, "Il contributo," 128.

37 Though obvious, it is still useful to note that *palmistria* comes from Latin *palmus*, 'the palm of a hand,' while palmomancy, as explained above, comes from Greek *palmós*, 'bodily quiver.'

38 For Anglo-Norman translations of Dextra viri sinistra mulieris, Palmistria Salomonis, and Chiromantia parva, as well as already well-known Middle Latin chiromantic books, see the edition by Stefano Rapisarda, *Manuali medievali di chiromanzia*, trans. with notes by Rosa Maria Piccione (Rome: Carocci, 2005), 93–124. This demonstrates a strong interest in this subject in England during the Plantagenet era.

39 Shakespeare, *Macbeth*, act IV, scene 1, line 45, where the second witch says "By the pricking of my thumbs, something wicked this way comes."

40 Molière, *The Imaginary Invalid*, act II, scene 8, where Argan rebukes his younger daughter Louison for lying to him. He is sure of it on grounds of palmomantic arguments: "Prenez-y bien garde au moins, car voilà un petit doigt qui sait tout, qui me dira si vous mentez.... Voilà mon petit doigt pourtant qui gronde quelque chose ... Attendez. Eh! ah! ah! oui? Oh, oh! voilà mon petit doigt qui me dit quelque chose que vous avez vu, et que vous ne m'avez pas dit." Louison then objects, "Ah! Mon papa, votre petit doigt est un menteur."

uncial used in many Bible manuscripts. Only a few non-biblical texts show the same handwriting, one of these being this handbook on twitches.[41] Did the very same milieu produce both Christian and divinatory texts? Or, more accurately, were the latter designed to be exactly like most venerable manuscripts of the Christian religion in fourth-century Egypt? It is not wholly unlikely that the scribe of P.Ryl. I 28 imitated the external features of Christian copying workshops in order to better promote his product.

Furthermore, we note that many clients of divination had, beyond any doubt, a given set of expectations. Twitch-papyri usually add a sequence of individual predictions, the so-called βίοι (Latin *vitae*, 'lives'), to their generally applicable prognostications that are good for everyone. Instead of general prophecies, the additional responses were addressed to different classes of users and applied only to their fates.[42] The structure of these divinatory handbooks was consequently framed to follow the requests of its audience in a very peculiar way. Presages drawn from fateful spasms thus also bear witness to what kind of audience used these texts in order to gain valuable answers for daily life. This perspective has been more or less neglected so far, but it is absolutely worthy of mention.[43] In the face of economic and social trouble, lot oracles reveal a sort of logic, since the diviner had not only to perform a ritual of secrete knowledge, but also to give his clients the most helpful advice and help them enact it. As already noted, in texts such as the *Sortes Sangallenses*,

41 It appears in the not exhaustive, but absolutely valuable list given by Herbert J. M. Milne and Theodore C. Skeat, *Scribes and Correctors of the Codex Sinaiticus*, including contributions by D. Cockerell (London: by the trustees of British Museum: 1938), 26, *P. Ryl.* 28 is quoted under nr. 4 with Biblical, Greek and Coptic codices, a long omega goes over ordinary form at every part of the line, compare Guglielmo Cavallo, *Ricerche sulla maiuscola biblica* (= *Studi e testi di papirologia* 2), (Florence: Edizioni Istituto papirologico «G. Vitelli» di Firenze, 1967): 62 and new documents presented by Pasquale Orsini, *Manoscritti in maiuscola biblica. Materiali per un aggiornamento* (Cassino: Edizioni dell'Università degli Studi di Cassino, 2005). For emphasis on text and Biblical writing in the third and fourth centuries, see David T.M. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998): 269.

42 Diels, *Zuckungsliteratur*: I 13; Costanza, *CPG*: 6–7, 211–12.

43 See observations from this perspective by Amphilochios Papathomas, "Eine neue palmomantische Schrift der späteren Römerzeit: Unbekannte Fassung aus dem Melampus-Traktat?" in *Paramone. Editionen und Aufsätze von Mitgliedern des Heidelberger Instituts für Papyrologie zwischen 1982 und 2004*, ed. James M. S. Cowey and Bärbel Kramer, Archiv für Papyrusforschung und verwandte Gebiete Beiheft 16 (Leipzig: K. G. Saur, 2004), 18–20, 30–32.

the diviner warned his clients to look out for their own good luck and to act solely on the grounds of self-interest.[44]

It is noteworthy that a series of four 'lives' regularly appears in P.Flor. III 391, where individual answers are repeatedly given in a canonical sequence, for the slave (δοῦλος); the girl of the age for marriage (παρθένος, 'virgin,' i.e. a young girl eligible for legitimate wedding in Graeco-Roman society);[45] the soldier (στρατιώτης), and the widow (χήρα). The same regular series of βίοι is found in P.Paramone 4, with the exception of the soldier who is not mentioned there.[46] Such details reveal much about the social composition of the reading public, in which women and the lower classes are well represented. A twitchbook such as P.Flor. III 391 regularly gives distinct prophecies to female categories, such as young girls eligible for marriage and widowed women, whence frequent prognostications of marriage.[47] In one response given in P.Flor. 391, ll. 17–18, the phrase συμβολὴ γάμου, 'marriage proposal,' allows us to understand an otherwise puzzling meaning of the word συμβολή used by itself in medieval palmomantic versions.[48] According to our prognostications, the end of widowhood, a rather frequent condition for women of that time, was to be expected not very often.[49] Because of her very vulnerable status without male defense, it is not surprising that the widow was more often expected to be injured and

44 In fact, as William E. Klingshirn clearly points out, the particular social code sanctioned by the *sortes* features a mistrust of authority, suspicion toward neighbors, a firm resolve to match favor for favor and insult for insult, and a quest for an available friend and patron. Briefly, it is an answer to the crisis in the Latin West of the fourth and fifth centuries. See Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul: The *Sortes Sangallenses*," in Johnston, *Mantikê*, 112–15.

45 For marital status in palmomancy see Chandezon, Dasen, and Vilgaux, "Dream Interpretation," 307, 309.

46 A triad of servant, young girl and widow recurs here. Papathomas, "Neue palmomantische Schrift," 22; Costanza, *CPG*, 94–97.

47 See παρθένῳ γάμον in P.Flor. III 391 lines 6, 20–21, 26, 33, 36–37, 40–41, 61–62, 73. Wedding predictions are also given for young girls in P.Ryl. I 28 and 30; PSI VI 728 41, 73; P.Paramone 4 34, [41]; P.Prag. IV Gr. Inv. 71 + 156 B 7. In the medieval manuscript tradition, see version A 11, 14, 31, 65, 81g, 83, 174, 184, 185; version B 6, 96.

48 Costanza, *CPG*, 212.

49 This is explicitly predicted for widows in medieval version A 1, where girls too are the addressee of the same prophecy, and A 88. Standards of living and the custom of marrying girls to men twenty years older or more led to a great number of widows. Claire Préaux, "Le statut de la femme à l'époque hellénistique, principalement en Égypte," *Recueils de la société Jean Bodin* 11 (1959): 161; Kenneth J. Dover, "Classical Greek Attitudes to Sexual Behaviour," in *Women in Antiquity: New Assessments*, ed. Richard Hawley and Barbara Levick (New York: Routledge, 1995), 145.

ill-treated.[50] Otherwise, social blame (ψόγος) was the result for women's misjudgment in a patriarchal society of guilt. The frequent responses that censure female readers are a clear statement of ways of thinking and directing social interaction between the sexes in late antiquity even through the use of mantic writings.[51] On the other hand, this clearly proves how readily women used palmomancy in Roman Egypt, perhaps because they lacked the same access to sacrificial divination linked with the most prestigious religious experience of the classical and post-classical polis. Handbooks on hieroscopy during imperial times present no responses for women, as we may infer from extant papyri issuing from the same milieu and attesting to similar ways of textual transmission. In this case, we have no evidence for female presence among the inquirers, given that no gender oriented answers are supplied in hieroscopic papyri, where it is rather a matter of business, trade or public activities.[52]

Slaves and soldiers are also frequently mentioned beside women in P.Flor. III 391, as noted above, and individual prophecies are often addressed to them, so we can admit their deep interest in such prognostications. These were people who had very little or no independence themselves and were particularly susceptible to changes in fate, such as the end or worsening of their slavery,[53] advancement in their career, or the vagaries of war[54] in which one wavered

50 See the prognostications of violence and maltreatment (*hýbris*) of widows in P.Flor. III 391 lines 30, 37, 51, [78]; PSI VI 728 line 3; P.Oslo III 76 lines 4. P.Paramone 4 forecasts the same for the slave (line 14), for the young girl (lines 26, [46]), and for the widow (line [23]). This prophecy recurs in the medieval tradition very often, especially for widows in version A 2, 7, 12, 15, 26, 76, 77, 90. Damage (*blábē*) is predicted to the widow in P.Flor. III 391 line 44 and version A 3, 9.

51 See prophecies of blame in P.Flor. III 391 lines 3, 47, 51 for the young girl, and line 55 for the widow; in P.Ryl. I 28 lines 49, 115 for the woman; P.Paramone 4 lines 3, 14, 22 for the young girl and line 26 for the widow; cf. Papathomas, "Neue palmomantische Schrift," 31. For further examples in the medieval tradition, see version A 2, 6, 7, 15, 23, 28, 33, 38, 42, 46, 76, 77, 90, 97 for girls; 21, 31, 41, 186 for widows; 69, 175 both for girls and widows; 148 for women. Version B 97 and 108 for the young girl; and later, versions C 29, 40, D 53, 71.

52 See e.g. the section 'On success and failure in present affairs' in P.Ross.Georg. I 21 lines 11–70, and 'On trade' (lines 70–123) devoted to businessmen. A more private core of interests appears in P.Amh. II 14, devoted to the choice of a true friend (i.e. a social alliance), though even from a male perspective, no woman was involved there; see Costanza, "P.Gen.Inv. 161," 39; Furley and Gysembergh, *Reading the Liver*, 41, 65.

53 See particularly P.Ryl. I 28 lines 34–35: a change in servitude (δούλῳ δὲ μετάστασιν τῆς δουλίας), and an easier servitude in lines 133–34 (ἐν δουλίᾳ κούφισιν ἐκ τῆς δουλίας). Also P.Flor. III 391, lines 25–26: the death of a master (δούλῳ δεσποτικὸν θάνατον).

54 A prognostication typically addressed to soldiers announces a promotion (*prokopḗ*) – a common expectation among members of the military classes. See P.Flor. III 391 lines 3, 18, 27, 41; PSI VI 728 line 3. The same prophecy recurs in medieval version A 1, 23. For the fate of war, see also *hodós*, 'journey' (literally 'way') in P.Flor. III 391 lines 34, 69.

between hope and fright for the final outcome of a campaign.[55] Moreover, socially inferior males lived in such apprehensive a condition of uncertainty as did women that they were not far from being assimilated to a female condition with regard to men of higher rank.[56] Observations on bodily tremors were, therefore, a frequently practiced way of prophecy in late antiquity to the great, but not exclusive, satisfaction of lower classes, as we can deduce from individual prognostications for rich people such as merchants and businessmen.

With regard to many other forms of divinatory writing strongly tied to occult lore, we must examine pseudepigraphic claims. It is to be emphasized that Greek palmomantic papyri do not feature clear titles or explicit authorship of treatises and their sources, other than what P.Ryl. I 28, l. 31 asserts of a certain prediction "as Berassos says."[57] As the papyrus' first editor proposed, this seems to be an obvious reference to the Babylonian astronomer and mathematician Berossos, a priest of Bel, whose pseudonymous *Astrologumena* (280 BCE) was well-known in the Roman imperial period.[58] A Syriac twitch-book is also ascribed to Galen, the great physician, maybe on the grounds of his medical writing περὶ τρόμου καὶ παλμοῦ, as the first editor supposed, but the attribution is more likely because he was regarded as a professional of esoteric lore.[59] To write under the assumed name of an eastern wise man could easily have been a warrant for success, since Chaldeans, together with Egyptians, were reputed to be the inventors of astrology and occult sciences by Greek-speaking people. Magicians and occultists would often claim ethnicity from Egypt or the Near East to win great acclaim

55 Prognostications for soldiers predict delightful results such as glory (*dóxa*: P.Flor. III 391 line 74), gains (*ōphelía*: P.Flor. III 391 line 37), and wealth (*euporía*: P. Flor. III 391 lines 15, 21, 44, 51), or on the contrary, very unpleasant results such as exile (*apodemía*: P.Flor. III 391 lines 10, 48), fright (*phóbos* in P.Flor. III 391 lines 7, 78). On religious views of soldiers at that time see László Kákosy, "Religion in römerzeitlichen Ägypten," *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt* 2, 18, 5, ed. Wolfgang Haase (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1995), 2923 with respect to a magic ritual of Marcus for the legion's safety.

56 For the 'wifely' use of love magic see e.g. Plutarch, *Luc.* 43.1–2, where the Greek freedman Callisthenes uses it on Lucullus in the hope of attracting more of his love. Cf. Faraone, *Love Magic*, 117, 127.

57 Line 31: ὡς βηρασσὸς λέγει. See Hunt, *Catalogue*, 60.

58 For the Babylonian *Urform*, given the difficulty of first *u* > η (see Babylonian *burašu*, 'pine-tree'), the form in –ασσος, as in our papyrus, seems to be the best corresponding form to the original eastern one. Paul Schnabel, *Berossos und die babylonisch-hellenistische Literatur* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1923, repr. Hildesheim: Georg Holms 1968), 3; Amélie Kuhrt, "Berossus' Babyloniaka and Seleucid Rule in Babylonia," in *Hellenism in the East: The Interaction of Greek and Non-Greek Civilizations from Syria to Central Asia after Alexander*, ed. Amélie Kuhrt and Susan Sherwin-White (London: Duckworth 1987), 53–55.

59 Furlani, "Due trattati," 730.

and meet with the public's approval. Indeed, this continued to happen in the Byzantine period, as Psellos clearly shows, accusing Patriarch Michael Cerularios of fondness for foreign charlatans who speak every language but Greek.[60] References to mysterious and arcane eastern wisdom are also frequent in the Greek Magical Papyri, where the very same culture as in twitch-books was at work. We may, for example, compare the pseudepigraphic claim for Pythagoras and Democritus as writers of oneiromantic recipes in PGM VII 795, or for the Persian wise man Astrampsychos (literally 'Star Soul') in the realm of love magic in PGM VIII. No such claims for supposed authors are to be found in our treatises on palmomancy. This may be considered as a proof that texts needed no further elements to promote their appeal, other than the prognostication itself, and that everyone could readily pick it out among so many options in the ancient book-trade of occult works. Users of late antique divinatory books thus had to recognize at first sight that a particular book concerned palmomancy just by reading of shaking limbs. On the contrary, many fictitious paternities are alleged in the medieval tradition of twitch-treatises, the most famous one being, no doubt, that of the mythical seer Melampus.[61]

One peculiar element in the inner structure of palmomantic papyri testifies to religious beliefs underlying the spread of mantic writing. These are the hilastic, that is, propitiatory invocations prescribed at the end of prognostications drawn from bodily movements. In our papyri, these prayers are addressed to deities of the traditional Greek pantheon, according to religious concepts involving the consultation of books that relate to such signs and promote an anxious search for divine favor.[62] The inquirer was directed by these frequent prescriptions to ask some 'pagan' deity for its goodwill, once

60 Edited from Ms. Paris. Gr. 1182, fol. 148 (thirteenth century) by Joseph Bidez, *Catalogue des manuscrits alchimiques grecs*, 8 vols. (Brussels: M. Lamertin, 1928), 6:71–89, esp. 76. Psellos points out the Byzantine preference for a foreign language, disregarding the Greek mantic tradition. Such a way of thinking is already evident in the form ἀγυρτεία in Porphyry. The alleged Persian twitch-book is to be related to this milieu; Costanza, "Due *incipit*," 606–10; Costanza, *CPG*, 200.

61 Authorship of versions A and B are credited to him, and a manuscript of version C to Hermes Trismegistus. Further pseudepigraphic claims to the names of Antiphon, Phemonoe (the first mythical Pythia), and the Egyptians are attested in prophecies of version A 17–18. Byzantine sources such as the Suda attribute palmomancy to Poseidonius, the Sibyl, and so on. Diels, *Zuckungsliteratur*, 1:8–10, 14–15; Vítek, "Palmické věštění," 255; Costanza, *CPG*, 20–30.

62 Diels, *Zuckungsliteratur*, 2:11; Costanza, *CPG*, 33–35; Dasen and Vilgaux, "De la palmomantique," 115.

he had noticed a tremor on himself.[63] Similarly, the superstitious man portrayed by Theophrastus asks various interpreters to which god or goddess he should sacrifice.[64] Prayers added to quiver-prognostications have closer parallels in sacrifices prescribed by *hemerologia*,[65] Christian *sortes*,[66] and Arabic palmomancy expounded by Muhammad Ibrāhīm b. Hisām, where such devotions are interpreted according to precepts of Islamic orthodoxy.[67]

For readers of Graeco-Egyptian quiver-treatises, these supplications were at once a way of calling for the god's help as well as a guarantee of fulfilling the prophecy. They were introduced by the use of a verb in the imperative mood, either ἱλάσκου, as in P.Flor. III 391, or εὔχου, as in P.Ryl. I 28. Despite its use of biblical uncial, the text of P.Ryl. I 28 puts forward genuinely 'pagan' ideas, evidence of only partial Christianization of Egypt at that time. The author of this handbook once explicitly says "Do pray to Aphrodite and make a sacrifice to her."[68] The reader of this book was then expressly told to carry out a sacrifice in honor of the goddess responsible for the observed twitch. This evidently proves that tremors were the effect of divine intervention, which then needed a duly performed propitiatory sacrifice. The semantic relation between the predicted prophecy and the deity to be invoked very seldom appears in an obvious way, as must have formerly been the rule, that is, at the very beginning of palmomantic practice deployed by street-corner diviners in still oral messages. So, when P.Ryl. I 28 forecasts affliction and injuries

63 Names of Greek deities are quoted exclusively for hilastic prayers in twitch-books, while other divinatory writings such as the dream-books collected by Artemidorus Daldianus (2nd c. CE) present similar results with a stronger presence of Egyptian gods such as Serapis, Isis and Anubis. See M. Carmen Barrigón Fuentes, "Les dieux égyptiens dans l'*Oneirocriticon* d'Artémidore," *Kernos* 7 (1994): 33; Costanza, "Il contributo," 130–31; Costanza, "I manuali," 181–83.

64 Theophrastus, *Char.* 16, 11, on which see Harris, *Dreams and Experience*, 135, 155.

65 Sam Eitrem and Leiv Amundsen, eds., *Papyri Osloenses* III (Oslo: Dybwad, 1936): 41 quote prayers to the sun from PGM III 501, and more complex invocations from PGM IV 1658. See also Hopfner, *Griechisch-ägyptischer Offenbarungszauber*, 1:405, 407; Reinhold Merkelbach and Maria Totti, *Abrasax. Ausgewählte Papyri religiösen und magischen Inhalts. 1: Gebete*. Papyrologica Coloniensia 17,1 (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1990), 104–22 on the consecration of a gem by invocating the sun at its epiphany at every hour of the day (PGM IV, 1596–716); Merkelbach and Totti, *Abrasax. Ausgewählte Papyri religiösen und magischen Inhalts. 2: Gebete* (*Fortsetzung*), Papyrologica Coloniensia 17, 2 (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1991), 1–31 on prayer to the sun according to the twelve hours of the day (δωδεκάωρος) in PGM III 494–609.

66 See Klingshirn, "Christian Divination," 106–7 on directions in the *Sortes Sangallenses* for performing prayers after each time one uses divinatory tools.

67 German trans. Diels, *Zuckungsliteratur*, 2:85–91: a prayer must be recited after any quivering of limbs.

68 P.Ryl. I 28 line 111: εὔχου Ἀφροδείτῃ καὶ θύε.

because of a friend, there is no reason to ask why the outraged person is told to pray to Nemesis, the goddess responsible for revenging faults and righting a wrong.[69] In other cases, no transparent correspondence is offered, as happens in epigraphic texts of astragalomancy, the art of using the sawn-off knuckle bones of sheep as lots (*sortes*), or imitations in bronze, wood, or ivory. Here too, we have no clear link between certain throws and the divinities to be invoked on the same occasion.[70]

No sign of these prayers is preserved in the medieval tradition of palmomancy – a too evident sign that old polytheism seemed irreconcilable with new religious parameters. Without papyrological evidence, we would not have any idea of hilastic prayers connected with prophetic twitches in the corresponding handbooks. Despite this, Christians were able to manage the same rules of invoking superior powers, as people previously did with respect to 'pagan' deities. So, there developed a newly oriented system of prayers in the realm of lot divination. In particular, the enquirer was now directed to pray to God or the Lord and to rely on divine assistance, as the Sortes Sangallenses clearly testify.[71] Similarly, in the Sortes Astrampsychi, papyri from the third and fourth century have the names of 'pagan' gods, while in many medieval manuscripts they have been replaced by the names of biblical figures, along with changes in the content of some questions in keeping with the new religious fashion.[72] Such a metamorphosis is not a surprise since, according to a typical trend in late antiquity, Christian saints and old popular deities before them were ultimately seen as the supernatural authoritative power behind oracle books.[73] In contrast with the links between books of the *sortes sanctorum* and saints' shrines and festivals,

69 P. Ryl. I 28 lines 135–40 = document II B 15 in Barbara Lichocka, *Némésis en Égypte romaine*, Aegyptiaca Treverensia 5 (Mainz: Philipp von Zabern, 2004), 150. The definition given here of "magic book of convulsions" and "receipt on convulsions" should be emended. Among these papyri, palmomantic texts are to be distinguished from magic ones insofar as they relate to divination.

70 As noted by Fritz Graf, "Rolling the Dice for an Answer," in Johnston, *Mantikê*, 64 (see also p. 60 on the definition of this technique, and pp. 82–84 for a full list of inscribed astragalomantic documents).

71 Here, references to hilastic prayers are expressed by formulae such as *Ora deum, Roga/Ora dominum*. See commentary and parallels discussed by Klingshirn, "Christian Divination," 107.

72 See Pieter Willem van der Horst, "Sortes: Sacred Books as Instant Oracles in Late Antiquity," in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. Leonard Victor Rutgers et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 166 n. 96 on the well-known example of the question "Will I be reconciled with my girlfriend?" which becomes "Will I become a bishop?" Cf. Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 677.

73 William E. Klingshirn, "Defining the Sortes Sanctorum: Gibbon, Du Cange, and Early Christian Lot Divination," *JECS* 10 (2002): 88–90; Klingshirn, "Christian Divination," 111–13;

hilastic polytheistic invocations were definitively abrogated in medieval Greek twitch-books, whereas they often recur in late antique writings, both in extant long sections, such as P.Flor. III 391[74] and P.Ryl. I 28,[75] where almost every omen is accompanied by such an invocation, or in P.Paramone 4 (= P.Vindob. G 2859v) too,[76] and even in smaller fragments such as P.Oslo III 76[77] and P.Mich. XVIII 766.[78]

Each of the above-named palmomantic books illustrates a multifarious world of divining that believers used to rely upon entirely. As external or internal signs allowed a good opportunity for prognostic practice, it also happens that one's body itself could serve as the tool of choice and a privileged source of predictions. This type of ancient divination plays a far-from-minor role in helping us understand presuppositions of cultural, social and religious practices at this time. Furthermore, it is rich in shedding light upon the general context of lots and makes clearer the recurring attempts by people to know their own destinies. To use the imagery of the *sortes*, divination plays dice to acquire the final knowledge of Fate in order to manage one's future. It is in fact a Promethean pretense to have no more barrier between gods and humans. Books on twitches allowed anyone to gain knowledge of their fate at very little expense, since they constituted one among many different randomizing devices, but one of the easiest kinds you could possibly have conceived. The phenomenon was, no doubt, even more widespread than it may today appear to have been on the grounds of available papyrological and documentary evidence, as fragmentary as it is. Mantic lore presented an attractive opportunity for people in late antiquity to obtain godlike prescience by its methods: why not have a try?

David Frankfurter, "Voices, Books, and Dreams: The Diversification of Divination Media in Late Antique Egypt," in Johnston, *Mantikê*, 247–48.

74 Prayers to Cronos at line 15; Demeter at line 18; Hecate at lines 4, 41, 48; Helios at lines 11, 27, 44, 55; Hermes at lines 34, 52, 87; Nemesis at line 21; Zeus at lines 23, 31.

75 Prayers are to be made to Aphrodite at lines 111–12; Dionysus at line 206; Hermes at lines 126, 191; Nemesis at lines 139–40, 177; Nike at lines 13, 172–73; Tyche at lines 100–1, 148, 159, 197, 200. Cf. Hunt, *Catalogue*, 56–65, esp. 58 on P.Ryl. I 28, which regularly gives instructions to propitiate deities; P.Flor. III 391 does this systematically. The two treatises do not agree on the content of invocations added to the same responses, even when there is agreement between corresponding prognostications. Subsequently, these prayers were originally listed apart from the general prognostication. In any event, they are indebted to, or perhaps a legacy of, the old Graeco-Egyptian religious system.

76 Prayers to Helios at line 9; Hermes lines 23, 68 (restored; the name is lost in a lacuna).

77 To Helios at line 5. See Eitrem, *Papyri Osloenses*, 41–42; Salvatore Costanza, "P.Osl. III 76: un testimone della *Versio* A dello Ps.-Melampo," *Aeg* 84 (2004): 139.

78 To Moira at line 13. Another invocation is restored at line 2.

Appendix 1: Palmomantic Papyri

P.Flor. III 391 (= *CPG* 1)[79]

Date: first half of third century CE.

Length: bi-folium of a codex, four columns of writing, respectively no. 23–26 of the treatise, page 23 x 28 cm.

Movements: from left buttock to toes, which is the handbook's conclusion.

Lives: regular tetrad of slave, young girl, widow and soldier.

Hilastic invocations: prayers at the end of any prognostication, prevailing of chthonic invocations (Hecate, Demeter and Chronos).

Syntactic feature: basic structure, quivering limbs within subjunctive or participle in dependent clause (protasis) and relative consequence (apodosis) in the present tense.

Link with medieval tradition: independent version, but many coincidences with prognostications in versions A, B, are to be observed.[80]

P.Ryl. I 28 (= *CPG* 2)[81]

Date: fourth century CE.

Length: eight folia, 7,5 x 6,6 cm (miniature codex).

Movements: from belly to toes, which is the handbook's conclusion.

Lives: no regular series of individual prophecies; occasionally, certain categories as slave, poor, bachelor, woman, and so on, are pointed out.[82]

Hilastic invocations: prayers occasionally prescribed, once jointly with a sacrifice to be made.

Syntactic feature: more formal freedom, no division between general and individual prognostications, apodosis frequently in the future tense.[83]

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79 Edited by Girolamo Vitelli, "Dai papiri greci dell'Egitto," *Atene & Roma* 7 (1904); more recently Costanza, *CPG*, 43–52.

80 In particular, thrice with A and B; twice with B, once with B and C or with later version D (Costanza, *CPG*, 50–52). This proves that written material originally circulating in distinct lists of prognostications was assembled again and again in late antique and early Byzantine treatises.

81 Edited by Hunt, *Catalogue*, 56–65; Costanza, *CPG*, 53–66.

82 The only parallel for ἄγαμος, the unmarried man, is found in the allegedly Persian twitch-book of Byzantine times, §1 and 3, where particular attention is devoted to different life conditions. Costanza, "Due *incipit*," 614; Costanza, *CPG*, 220.

83 See e.g. the prognostication for the left ankle in P.Ryl. I 28, lines 165–67: ἐν κρίσει βαρη[θ] εἰς ἔσται καὶ ἐκφεύξεται, which version A 156 summarizes as νικῆσαι ἐν κριτηρίῳ δηλοῖ. On the stylistic freedom of P.Ryl. I 28 approximating the oral transmission of responses, see Costanza, *CPG*, 54.

Link with medieval tradition: independent version; many coincidences with early medieval versions.[84]

PSI VI 728 (= *CPG* 3)[85]
Date: fourth century CE.
Length: two folia (folia I: 13 [+ 8] x 27,8 cm; folia II: 13 x 13,5 cm) and two fragments (fr. A: 3 x 14,5 cm; fr. B: 5 x 10 cm).
Movements: from left eyebrow to shoulder (fol. 1–2) and some lost twitches in fragments 1–2.[86]
Lives: slave, young girl, widow and soldier appear in fol. 1; young girl in fol. 2.
Hilastic invocations: no prayer attested in the extant section.
Syntactic feature: basic structure; frequently subjunctive in the active voice (ἐὰν ἄλλῃ) in the dependent clause (protasis) varying with middle-passive voice (ἐὰν ἄλληται) which is otherwise regularly employed in our texts.[87]
Link with medieval tradition: testimony of version B.[88]

P.Oslo III 76 (= *CPG* 4)[89]
Date: fourth century CE.
Length: fragment of nine lines (6 x 4 cm).
Movements: from cheek (ll. 3–7) to jaw (ll. 8–9), the mention of a quivering limb is lost in the first prognostication (ll. 1–2).
Life: merchant restored in line 1.
Hilastic invocation: prayer to the sun in line 5.
Syntactic feature: very basic structure.
Link with medieval tradition: testimony of version A.[90]

P.Mich. XVIII (= *P. Michigan Koenen*) 766 (= *CPG* 5)[91]
Date: third to fourth century CE.

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84 In particular, when A = B; cf. Costanza, *CPG*, 64–66.
85 Edited by Rostagno, *Papiri greci*, 166–68; Costanza and Pintaudi, "PSI VI 728"; Costanza, *CPG*, 67–77.
86 According to a new presentation of fragments in two folia edited by Costanza and Pintaudi, "PSI VI 728": fol. 1 = A + C (ed. Rostagno) and 2 = B (ed. Rostagno), and some smaller fragments.
87 See Costanza, *CPG*, 67, 212. But P.Flor. III 391 also shows the active form, e.g. line 16: ἐὰν πάλῃ.
88 Compare Costanza, *CPG*, 75–77.
89 Edited by Eitrem, *Papyri Osloenses*, 40–42; Costanza, "P.Osl. III 76"; Costanza, *CPG*, 78–81.
90 Compare Costanza, *CPG*, 79–81.
91 Edited by Prince, *P. Michigan*, 53–65; Pintaudi and Costanza, "Frammento," 78–80; Costanza, *CPG*, 85–88.

Length: fragment of sixteen lines of writing (5,5 × 9,9 cm).
Movements: head, the very incipit of the treatise being preserved.
Lives: none preserved.
Hilastic invocations: one prayer at line 12 and another restored in the blank at line 2.
Syntactic feature: remarkable use of adversative turns of phrases (ll. 4, 5, 7), *dativus pro genitivo* in line 15.
Link with medieval tradition: testimony of version A's incipit.[92]

P.Paramone 4 (= P.Vindob. *G* 2859 *verso*), (= *CPG* 6)[93]
Date: third to fourth century CE.
Length: two columns of writing (25,5 × 9,8 cm) totaling seventy-four lines.
Movements: from neck to right fingers.[94]
Lives: series of slave, young girl, and widow appear regularly.
Hilastic invocations: some prayers, but not recurrently given.
Syntactic feature: very basic structure.
Link with medieval tradition: testimony of version A, with some divergent elements.[95]

P.Oxy. 2630 verso (= *CPG* 7)[96]
Date: third to fourth century CE.
Length: fragment of eleven lines, the first and last two of which are nearly lost (5,5 × 7,5 cm).
Movements: right toes, which is the handbook's conclusion.
Lives: none preserved.
Hilastic invocations: none preserved.
Syntactic feature: basic structure, implicit protasis (ll. 5–7).
Link with medieval tradition: independent version.[97]

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92 Compare Costanza, *CPG*, 87–88.

93 Edited by Papathomas, "Neue palmomantische Schrift," 18–42; Costanza, "P.Vindob. G 2859 verso: rapporti e connessioni con la tradizione palmomantica," *Aeg* 83:1–2 (2003): 105–31; Costanza, *CPG*, 89–97.

94 *Pace* Papathomas, "Neue palmomantische Schrift," 20–42, one must recognize that it is matter of quivering fingers instead of toes, as confirmed by some required supplements concerning the hand (lines 61–62, 65, 70) and substantial comparisons with version A. Thus the new order of limbs proposed by Costanza, "P.Vindob. G 2859 verso," 107–19, with subsequent attempts at restoration; Costanza, *CPG*, 89–95.

95 Compare Costanza, *CPG*, 93–97.

96 Not yet published. Discussion, commentary and Italian translation by Costanza, *CPG*, 103–5.

97 Compare Costanza, *CPG*, 104–5; some points of contact only with P.Ryl. I 28.

P.Prag.Inv. G 71 + 156 (= *CPG* 8)[98]
Date: third century CE.
Length: One folium written on recto and verso totaling forty-one lines.
Movements: from buttock to heel.
Lives: not regularly, but often young girl and widow are mentioned, as well as helmsman and slave.
Hilastic invocations: none attested.
Syntactic feature: basic structure.
Link with medieval tradition: independent testimony, but with significant points of contact with version B.[99]

P.Mich.Inv. 4281b (= Palmomantic Papyrus 9)[100]
Date: third century CE.
Length: fragment of two columns (twelve lines in col. 2).
Movements: brain and back of the head.
Lives: none attested.
Hilastic invocations: prayers attested in line 8 to A[...] and in line 14 to Herakles.
Syntactic feature: basic structure.
Link with medieval tradition: testimony of version A, to be compared with *CPG* 5.

P.Runnels (= Palmomantic Papyrus 10)[101]
Date: third century CE.
Length: two fragments, the first has three columns, and the other consists of only a few letters.
Movements: from the left shoulder blade to the fingers.
Lives: none attested.
Hilastic invocations: none attested.
Syntactic feature: basic structure, very similar to the latest medieval treatises.
Link with medieval tradition: some affinity with version B.

98 Edited by Costanza, *CPG*, 107–10.
99 Compare Costanza, *CPG*, 109–10.
100 Edited by Nikos Litinas, "Un nuovo papiro di palmomanzia nell'Università del Michigan," *Archiv für Papyrusforschung* 60 (2014): 360.
101 Edited by van Minnen, "A New Palmomantic Text," 62.

Appendix 2: Palmomantic Synopsis Sample Comparison of Greek Twitch-Books

Twitch	Late Antique Papyri	Medieval Manuscripts
ἐγκέφαλος brain	P.Mich. XVIII 766, ll. 13–14 ἐὰν ἐνκέφαλος ἅλληται, χρόνιον νόσον σημαίνει P.Mich.Inv. 4281b, col. II, ll. 3–5 ἐν[κέφαλος ἐὰν ἅλη]|τ[αι, χρόνι]ον νό|σον [σ]ημαίνε[ι]	Version A 8 ἐγκέφαλος ἐὰν ἅλληται, νόσον δηλοῖ τῷ ὑγιαίνοντι, τῷ νοσοῦντι δὲ ὑγείαν καὶ αὔξησιν Version D 3 ἐγκέφαλος ἐὰν ἅλληται, χρόνιον νόσον δηλοῖ
γόνυ εὐώνυμον left knee	P.Flor. 391, ll. 16–18 ἀηδίαν δηλοῖ | δούλῳ ἐλευθερία<ν>, παρθένῳ συν̣βολὴν | γάμου, χήρᾳ εὐωχίαν, στρ(α-τιώτῃ) προκ[οπ]ήν. Ἰλ(άσκου) Δήμ(ητρα) P.Ryl. 28, ll. 102–05 μεταστασί|ας καὶ ἀηδίας δηλοῖ| ἀπὸ θηλυκῶν	Version A 144 ἀηδίαν μεγάλην δηλοῖ Version B ἀηδίαν σημαίνει
κερκὶς δεξιά right shin-bone	P.Flor. 391, ll. 46–48 λυπηθήσεται ἐπὶ φίλων <ἢ> |συγγεν̣ῶν προσώπων· δούλῳ εὐπορίαν, | παρθένῳ ψόγον, χήρᾳ ὠφελίαν, στρ(ατιώτῃ) ἀποδημίαν. Ἰλάσκου Ἐκ[ά]την P.Ryl. 28, ll. 137–40 λυπηθήσε|ται ὁ τοιοῦτος διὰ φί|λον, γενήσε-ται δὲ ἐν| ἐπηρίᾳ, εὔχου Νεμέ|σει	Version A 153 λύπην δηλοῖ Version B 129 λύπην ὑπὸ φίλων σημαίνει
κερκὶς εὐώνυμος left shin-bone	P.Flor. 391, ll. 49–52 ὁ̣δὸν μακρὰν| ἀπροσδόκητον δηλοῖ· δούλῳ ταραχάς, παρθένῳ ψόγον, χήρᾳ ὕβριν, στρ(ατιώτῃ) εὐπορίαν. | Ἰλάσκου Ἑρμῆν P. Ryl. 28, ll. 142–45 ὁδὸν μακρὰν| πορεύσεται ἀπροσδό|κητον ἐφ᾽ ᾗ καὶ λυπη|θήσεται ὁ τοιοῦτος	Version A 153 ὁδὸν ἐπικερδῆ δηλοῖ = Version B 130 (σημαίνει)

Appendix 3: Astral Dactylothesia Quiver-Version A 90–94 and Chiromantic Tract in Erlang. 89 (= E)

Finger	Planetary ruler in A	Planetary ruler in E
Thumb	Venus	Venus
Index	Mars	Jupiter
Palm	–	Mars
Middle finger	Saturnus	Saturnus
Ring-finger	Sun	Sun
Little finger	Mercurius	Mercurius

Between the above-named divinatory treatises, there is perfect agreement on every point apart from the index finger in A being under the rule of Mars instead of Jupiter as in E. This can be explained by the fact that E divides the index finger between the finger itself (λιχανός), under Jupiter's influence, and the palm at its base (μετάθεναρ), ruled by Mars.[102] Such a distinction was progressively abolished so that the index finger is understood as a unity, with the λιχανός and μετάθεναρ taken together.

102 See the chiromantic tract in Erlang. 89 (ed. Boll, *Catalogus* VII, 237): τὸ δὲ μετάθεναρ ὁ τόπος ἐστὶν ὁ ἀπὸ τοῦ τέλους τοῦ λιχανοῦ μέχρι τῆς ῥίζης τοῦ ἀντίχειρος. This writing on hand-divination is also preserved in Laur.Plut. 28,13, as noted above.

CHAPTER 4

Hermēneiai in Manuscripts of John's Gospel: an Aid to Bibliomancy

Kevin Wilkinson[1]

At the beginning of the twentieth century, some peculiar papyrus and parchment fragments of the Gospel of John started to appear in print.[2] In each case, a portion of the biblical text, 1–5 verses in length and always coinciding with periods, is written at the top of the page. This is followed on the next line, or after a gap, by the word ἑρμηνεία, 'interpretation,' indented or centered in the column. Below this, at the bottom of the page, is a short non-scriptural sentence (fig. 4.1).

It appears that these fragments come from manuscripts that once contained continuous biblical text, probably the entire Gospel, arranged in just this way throughout. The natural inference at first, given the regular occurrence of the word *hermēneia*, was that the non-scriptural material at the bottom of the page was a sort of running commentary. The problem with this theory, however, is that the 'interpretations' are hardly expository; indeed, they seem to

1 A version of this chapter was delivered at the Annual Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature in November 2006 (Washington, DC). I am grateful to the audience there and to my fellow panelists, especially AnneMarie Luijendijk and Thomas Kraus, for helpful feedback. I also owe a debt of gratitude to William Klingshirn for his insightful comments on a draft of the present chapter and for kindly allowing me to use his personal microform facsimile of Paris, BnF Lat. 11553 (g^1). This allowed me to check notes that I made during an initial inspection of the manuscript at the Bibliothèque Nationale in July 2006. Since then, scanned images have been made available on the BnF website. This chapter was written without the benefit of seeing the recent work by Jeff Childers on BL Add. 17119, a Syriac manuscript of John's Gospel containing a nearly complete set of *hermēneiai*; see Childers's contribution in the present volume. Systematic comparison of that manuscript with the Greek, Coptic, and Latin witnesses studied here is a desideratum.

2 Hermann von Soden, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments in ihrer ältesten erreichbaren Textgestalt auf Grund ihrer Textgeschichte*, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1902), XI (this fragment is now lost); Walter E. Crum, "Two Coptic Papyri from Antinoe," *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 26 (1904): 174–78, at 174–76. For a list of similar fragments that have been published over the last century or so, see the table at the end of this chapter.

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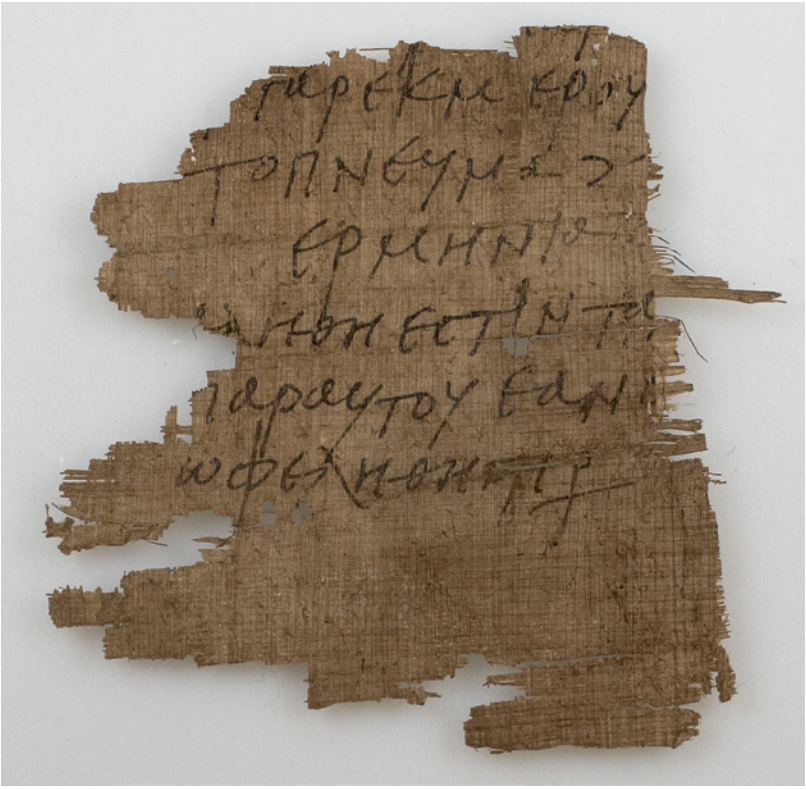

FIGURE 4.1 P.Monts.Roca 83 (P.Barc. 83), recto. The conclusion of John 3:34, followed by the word ἑρμην⟨ε⟩ία, centered in the column, and a three-line oracular sentence at the bottom of the page (with concluding Christogram)
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have little or nothing to do with the passages of John that they accompany.[3] This was truly an enigma.

Oddly enough, the crucial intervention came almost simultaneously with the publication of these first fragments, and from a scholar who was quite unaware of their existence. In his 1901 study of the marginalia contained in the biblical Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis (D), J. Rendel Harris devoted considerable attention to a series of sixty-nine sentences written, one per page, in the lower margins of the Gospel of Mark (fol. 285*b*–321*a*); each one is preceded by the word *hermēneia*.[4]

3 Already Crum, "Two Coptic Papyri," 175–76, suggested a possible connection with scriptural anaphora (sometimes called *hermēneiai* in the Coptic tradition).

4 J. Rendel Harris, *The Annotators of the Codex Bezae, with Some Notes on Sortes Sanctorum* (London: C. J. Clay & Sons, 1901); he transcribes them on pp. 59–64. They are also listed in Frederick H. Scrivener, *Bezae Codex Cantabrigiensis* (Cambridge, 1864), 451–52. The word ἑρμηνεία is almost always preceded by what Scrivener took to be an abbreviation of πρός and

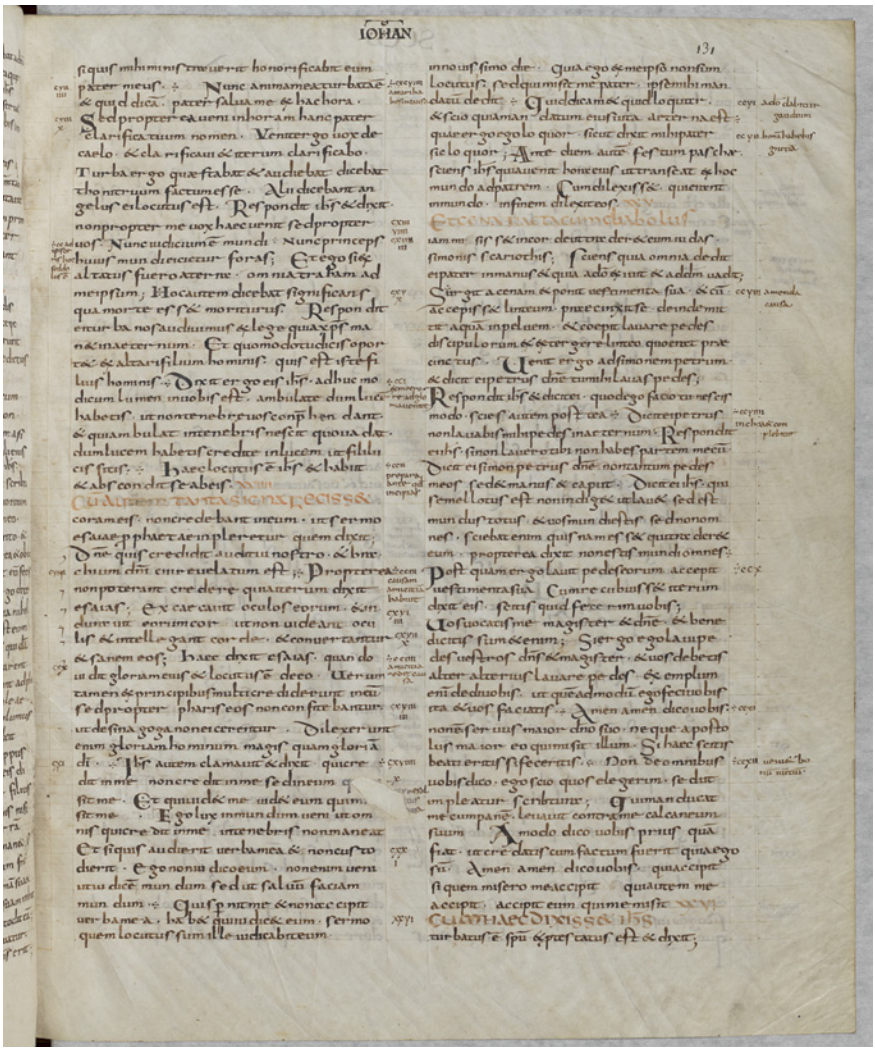

FIGURE 4.2 Paris, BnF Lat. 11553, fol. 131r
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Harris made two key observations.[5] First, he observed that these were not fragments of a biblical commentary, as the word *hermēneia* might suggest, but rather personal fortunes or oracles (*sortes*). Second, he noticed that these sixty-nine *sortes*

what Harris thought might signify ἀρχή. As suggested to me by William Klingshirn, however, it is more likely to be a Christogram.

5 Aspects of his important research on this topic had appeared somewhat earlier than the book cited in the previous note: J. Rendel Harris, "The 'Sortes Sanctorum' in the St. Germain Codex (g^1)," *AJP* 9 (1888): 58–63; J. Rendel Harris, *Codex Bezae: A Study of the So-Called Western Text of the New Testament*, Texts and Studies 2.1 (Cambridge, 1891), 7–11.

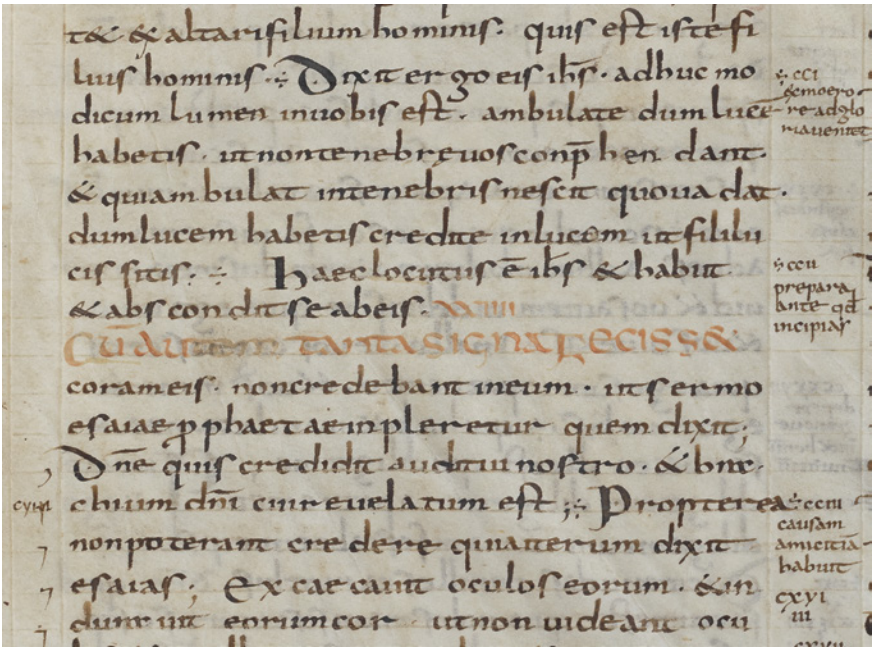

FIGURE 4.3 Paris, BnF Lat. 11553, fol. 131r (detail from the left column of the page shown in fig. 4.2)
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corresponded to a Latin system preserved in the margins of the Gospel of John in Codex Sangermanensis 15 (g^1).[6] In this eighth- or ninth-century manuscript, the Latin text of John is divided into 316 sections, not arranged one per page as in the fragments described above, but simply separated by a siglum (÷); these sections are accompanied in the margin by ascending numbers (with many imperfections); and 185 of these numbers are followed by oracles of the sort found in Bezae (figs. 4.2–4.3).

In fact, where the two systems overlap, they are virtually identical. They can be arranged in parallel columns as follows:[7]

6 Paris, BnF Lat. 11553, fol. 125*a*–134*b*. The initial insight into the nature of the system contained in this manuscript came from S. Berger, review of John Wordsworth, *The Gospel according to St. Matthew from the St. Germain Codex* (Oxford, 1883), in *Bulletin Critique* 5 (1884): 361–66, at 364.

7 Taken from Harris, *Annotators*, 59. The spelling in some of these Greek *hermēneiai* deviates so starkly from standard orthography that no attempt is made to apply accents and breathings.

Codex Bezae		g^1
No. (by count)	Actual no.	
1) αφες μϊ φιλονϊκησϊς	i.	cessa ei (*l.* ne) certaveris
2) το γγνωμενον τελϊουτε	ii.	q(uo)d fit co(m)pletitu(r)
3) ουκ επϊτυχανις του παρυματος	iii.	non adipsis (*l.* adipisceris) causa(m)
4) τελϊουμενον παργαμα	iiii.	perficitur causa[8]
5) περϊ ζωης		
6) το υστερον επιτυχανς		
7) μϊ ωμοσης εαν ωμοσϊς φανερουτε		
etc.		

The Latin system of g^1 does not contain an equivalent for the Greek introductory formula *hermēneia*.[9] Clearly, however, these are two very closely related versions of the same sequence of oracles, although the Greek witness of Bezae contains only the beginning, and the Latin witness of g^1 is lacunose throughout.

The relevance of Harris's discoveries to the papyrus and parchment fragments described above is now obvious, but it took several decades for anyone to make the connection. In 1953, Otto Stegmüller published two more parchment fragments of John's Gospel with *hermēneiai* and connected them with the evidence from Bezae and g^1 treated by Harris.[10] As he was able to show, there is not merely a generic similarity; where they overlap, the fragments can sometimes be correlated with Bezae and/or g^1 in content and order. It was finally evident at this point that all of these partial witnesses testified to a single oracular system. The work of Harris and Stegmüller was then picked up by Hans Quecke, who demonstrated further connections between the various witnesses and established what remains the *communis opinio*: that the

8 At this point, g^1 is lacking several oracles. It picks up again with no. 13 and the two systems are fully back in harmony with no. 15: μετα δεκα ημερας γϊνετε (D) = est (*l.* post) dece(m) dies fiet (g^1).

9 This is not exactly true. Harris was working with a transcription of the marginalia in g^1 supplied by a Mr. G. L. Youngman (Harris, "'Sortes Sanctorum' in the St. Germain Codex," 59–60; Harris, *Codex Bezae*, 8; Harris *Annotators*, 59). Unfortunately, the transcription is defective at many points, as I was able to confirm upon examination of the manuscript. On fol. 132*b, sors* no. 247 reads in Harris's transcription *interpretati causa tibi immanet* (Harris, *Annotators*, 68). Because this is nonsensical, he tentatively suggested *insperata* for the first word (i.e., "Something unexpected is about to happen for you"). In fact, however, the first word clearly reads *interpretatio* (*sc.* ἑρμηνεία). This is a case, therefore, where the introductory formula was retained and translated, probably through oversight.

10 Otto Stegmüller, "Zu den Bibelorakeln im Codex Bezae," *Biblica* 34 (1953): 13–22.

hermēneiai are not a running commentary, but rather a series of oracles that have nothing to do with the biblical text.[11]

This is a record of genuine progress in scholarship, but there is perhaps another step that has yet to be taken. The consensus view, articulated most clearly by Quecke, leaves two puzzles unexplained. First, why are these oracles introduced by the word *hermēneia*? It is a rather casual perspective on language that would allow one to say that the word simply means 'oracle' in this case. That is hardly satisfying. Second, why would anyone go to the trouble of arranging the Gospel of John into discreet units, each associated with a *hermēneia*, if the oracles have nothing to do with the biblical text? The solution to these puzzles, it seems to me, is obvious: the *hermēneiai* must have everything to do with the passages from John that they accompany. They must indeed be 'interpretations' of the Gospel, but interpretations or translations into an oracular idiom. They must be, in other words, an aid to bibliomancy. The person who wanted to inquire into his or her fate would consult the Gospel, read a random passage, and then look to the interpretation at the bottom of the page (or in the margin) in order to discover how this word from God was applicable to his or her situation. If anyone has recognized that this must be the case, no one has stated it clearly, and no one has demonstrated how precisely it all works.[12] This is the task undertaken in the following pages.

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11 Hans Quecke, "Zu den Joh-Fragmenten mit 'Hermeneiai'," *OCP* 40 (1974): 407–11; Quecke, "Zu den Joh-Fragmenten mit 'Hermeneiai' (Nachtrag)," *OCP* 43 (1977): 179–81. See also, independently, Bruce M. Metzger, "Greek Manuscripts of John's Gospel with 'Hermeneiai,'" in *Text and Testimony: Essays on New Testament and Apocryphal Literature in Honour of A. F. J. Klijn*, ed. Tjitze Baarda (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1988): 162–69.

12 Two recent studies perceptively note that the *hermēneiai* are likely connected to the biblical text in some way but curiously deny that they are oracular in nature: Stanley E. Porter, "The Use of Hermeneia and Johannine Papyrus Manuscripts," in *Akten des 23. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses, Wien, 22.-28. Juli 2001* (Vienna: Verlag der österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), 573–80; Wally V. Cirafesi, "The Bilingual Character and Liturgical Function of 'Hermeneia' in Johannine Papyrus Manuscripts: A New Proposal," *NovT* 56 (2014): 45–67. That the *hermēneiai* are oracles is self-evident. Another recent study deals only with the biblical text in these fragments: David C. Parker, "Manuscripts of John's Gospel with Hermeneiai," in *Transmission and Reception: New Testament Text-critical and Exegetical Studies*, ed. Jeff W. Childers (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias Press, 2006), 48–68 = Parker, *Manuscripts, Texts, Theology: Collected Papers, 1977–2007* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2009), 121–38.

1 The Papyrus and Parchment Fragments

The biggest stumbling block to the hypothesis just proposed is the widely held opinion that there are no connections between the *hermēneiai* and the gospel passages that they accompany.[13] But is this true? Let us begin our investigation with the papyrus and parchment fragments, only six of which are extensive enough to warrant comment.[14]

In P.Ness. 2.3, three *hermēneiai* are sufficiently preserved to give a sense of their content. All of these can be correlated quite clearly with the biblical text.[15] Bifolio 4*a* contains John 11:40–43, in which Jesus calls Lazarus out of the tomb. The accompanying *hermēneia* begins ο νοσων ε̣[. This oracle dealt with the fortunes of a sick person, presumably forecasting a recovery, and is obviously appropriate to the gospel text. The *hermēneia* on the next page, which preserves John 11:44–46, is too fragmentary to interpret, but the subsequent one (bifol. 4*c*) can be read in full. The text is John 11:47–48, in which the chief priests and Pharisees plot against Jesus out of fear that everyone will come to believe (πιστεύσουσιν) in him. The accompanying oracle reads α̣πι̣στια και δολος εν τω πραγ̣[μ]ατ̣[ι, "There is faithlessness and connivance in the matter."[16] This *hermēneia* picks up both the treachery of those who were plotting against Jesus in the narrative and also key vocabulary in order to warn the inquirer about his or her situation. Bifolio 4*d* contains the next bit of gospel text, John 11:49–52, in which Caiaphas declares that it is better for one man to die for the people than to see the whole nation perish; the narrator interprets this as an unwitting prophecy of the salvation that comes through Jesus' death. The accompanying *hermēneia* reads σ]ω̣τ̣ηρι[α] κ̣αλη, "An excellent salvation."[17] This translates the gospel reference to Christ's salvation into an oracular context, in which

13 E.g., Quecke, "Zu den Joh-Fragmenten mit 'Hermeneiai' (Nachtrag)," 179: "keine Kommentare zum biblischen Text …, sondern Orakelantworten …, die mit dem Bibeltext, den sie begleiten, nichts zu tun haben"; Metzger, "Greek Manuscripts of John's Gospel," 166–67: "that they are not intended as exegetical comments on the Scripture text given above on the page will be obvious to anyone who compares any *hermeneia* with the content of the passage from John given on that page."

14 Several other fragments fall into this class but are too fragmentary to evaluate; see the table at the conclusion of this chapter.

15 Lionel Casson and Ernest L. Hettich, eds., *Excavations at Nessana*, vol. 2 (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1950), 79–93 (Joseph van Haelst, *Catalogue des papyrus littéraires juifs et chrétiens*, Série Papyrologie 1 [Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 1976], no. 429).

16 The word πρᾶγμα (Lat. *causa*) appears repeatedly in these oracles and refers to the 'thing/matter/affair' that is being inquired into.

17 Cf. g[1], no. 173 (salus bona), which is aligned with John 11:11–15.

the forecast is of a lucky escape from some predicament or other. These correspondences are surely not accidental. It is unfortunate that the *hermēneiai* in this manuscript are so poorly preserved, for they seem to have suffered less displacement than is evident in some of our other witnesses (see below).

A second case for correspondence between the *hermēneiai* and the gospel text can be made on the basis of P.Monts.Roca 83 (fig. 4.1).[18] The verso of this small fragment is too incomplete to assess, but the recto supplies usable evidence. It preserves the conclusion of John 3:34, and it is probable that the top of the page would have contained verse 33 as well: "Whoever has accepted his testimony has certified this, that God is true (ἀληθής ἐστιν). He whom God has sent speaks (λαλεῖ) the words of God, for he gives the spirit without measure" (John 3:33–34). The first part of the accompanying *hermēneia* reads, with a plausible restoration from the editor, αληθη εστιν τα λ̣[ελαλημενα] παρ αυτου, "The things [spoken] by him are true." Key vocabulary is deployed (ἀληθής, λαλέω) and the entire gist of the gospel text is cast in an oracular light (παρ' αὐτοῦ is suitably ambiguous and could be applied to anyone at all by the inquirer). The second part of the oracle contains another significant lacuna but the basic sense is clear: εαν ϛ[υ ± 9] ωφεληθηση, "If [you heed them?], you will be helped." Once again, the correspondence between biblical text and oracular sentence is clear.

A third example of correspondence can be found in P.Berol. 3607 + 3623, although it is perhaps less obvious than in the two fragments discussed above.[19] The first bit of text is John 5:44–47, in which Jesus claims that Moses testifies on his behalf and accuses those who reject him. The accompanying *hermēneia* reads μ]αρτυρια καλη, "An excellent testimony."[20] What this would mean to the inquirer who consulted the oracle is not exactly clear, but it certainly corresponds to the gospel passage. John 5:31–47 is a sort of legal argument for the validity of Jesus' claims; in fact, the word μαρτυρία and cognates appear eleven times in this discourse (without, however, appearing in verses 44–47). The next *hermēneia* in this manuscript accompanies John 6:1–2, in which Jesus leaves the scene to go to the other side of the Sea of Galilee, and reads διαλυσις γινε[ται. In an oracular context, this means that there will be a 'resolution' of the matter at hand; but does it correspond to the gospel narrative in any way? Perhaps it simply picks up the fact that one scene has ended and Jesus has

18 Formerly P.Barc. 83; Ramon Roca-Puig, "Papiro del Evangelio de San Juan con 'Hermeneia'," in *Atti dell'XI Congresso Internazionale di Papirologia, Milano 2–8 settembre 1965* (Milan: Istituto Lombardo di Scienze e Lettre, 1966), 225–36 (van Haelst, *Catalogue*, no. 441). See now Sofía Torallas Tovar and Klaas A. Worp, *Greek Papyri from Montserrat* (*P.Monts.Roca IV*), (Publicacions Abadia de Montserrat, 2014), 121–25.

19 Stegmüller, "Zu den Bibelorakeln," 18–19 (van Haelst, *Catalogue*, no. 443).

20 Cf. g[1], no. 70 (si credis testimonium bonum), which is aligned with John 5:28–29.

departed (*sc.* a διάλυσις). This may be less convincing than the other examples adduced so far, but it is perhaps the best that the creator of this oracular series could do with a biblical passage that is almost devoid of content.[21]

The connections in a parchment fragment from Damascus are less certain.[22] The fragment is now lost but, according to the published description, the first passage is John 6:26–27, in which Jesus tells a crowd of people to work for the food that brings eternal life. This is accompanied by a *hermēneia* that reads εαν πιστευσης καλως επιτυγχανεις, "If you believe, you will have good fortune."[23] The oracle is vague enough that it could be associated with virtually anything related to salvation, but it must be said that the connection here is not especially strong. It is difficult to say whether these belong together or not. The second passage in this fragment is John 6:28–29, in which Jesus says that doing the work of God means believing in the one whom he has sent. This seems a better fit for the previous *hermēneia* ("If you believe …"), but it is associated here with an oracle that reads περεχωμεν σωτηριας, "Let us furnish salvation" (?). Once again, this is vague enough to fit almost any context, but it is also not entirely perspicuous and the use of the first-person plural (if that is what it is) is strange for an oracular utterance. It seems that there is little of value in this lost fragment for our investigation.

We remain in murky waters with P.Berol. 11914 (New Testament papyrus 𝔓[63]). The first extant *hermēneia* in this bilingual Greek-Coptic series reads δοξα μεγαλη γινεται / ⲟⲩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲛⲟϭ ⲛ̄ⲥⲟⲟⲩ ⲛⲁϣⲱⲡⲉ, "There will be great glory."[25] This fortune accompanies John 3:14–15: "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life." The oracle may be more suitable to a passage that contains the word δόξα or cognate (of which there are many in John's Gospel), but it is also possible that the forecast of future glory was inspired by the language of 'lifting up' or the promise of eternal life. The next *hermēneia* in the series reads περι ελεγξεως παυσει μη ποιηση / ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩϫⲡⲓⲟ ϩⲣⲟⲕ ⲙ̄ⲡ̄ⲣⲁⲁϥ, "Concerning rebuke, stop; don't do it." This accompanies John 3:16–18 and could conceivably be related to the gospel claim that God did *not* send his Son to *condemn* (κρίνῃ) the world. The first two extant *hermēneiai* in this manuscript, therefore, can be correlated with their passages, but the connections are perhaps a little weaker

21 For a similar *hermēneia* in conjunction with a transition between gospel stories, see no. 26 in Codex Bezae (discussed below).

22 Described in von Soden, *Die Schriften des Neuen Testaments*, xi (van Haelst, *Catalogue*, no. 445).

23 Cf. g[1], no. 78 (si credis bene), which is aligned with John 6:25.

24 Stegmüller, "Zu den Bibelorakeln," 15–17 (van Haelst, *Catalogue*, no. 438).

25 Cf. g1, no. 34 (gloria magna), which is aligned with John 3:12–13.

than some of the examples discussed above. The second leaf from P.Berol. 11914 preserves two more consecutive oracles, but in these I can see no plausible relationship to the passages that they accompany.

There is also some uncertainty in a slightly more extensive bilingual series from Antinoë (Paris, BnF Copte 156).[26] Two or three of the *hermēneiai* in this manuscript can be plausibly correlated with the gospel passages that they accompany. The clearest example occurs in the fifth extant folio, where John 16:23–25 ("Ask and you will receive …") is followed by a *hermēneia* that reads [ⲡⲉⲧⲕⲱⲓ]ⲛ̣ⲉ ⲛ̄ⲥⲱⲟⲩ ⲭⲛⲁ[ϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲁ]ⲕ / [το ζητουμενον γι]γ̣εται σοι, "You will get what you seek."[27] Most of the *hermēneiai* in Paris, BnF Copte 156 do not correspond with their passages in this manner, but this generally negative assessment needs to be qualified: in some cases, the oracles that look to be unrelated to their associated gospel texts fit very well with passages in the immediate vicinity. In the first extant folio, for example, the oracle ⲁⲡⲟⲧⲁ[ⲥⲥⲉ / αποταξ[αι, 'Yield,' bears no obvious relationship to the passage that it accompanies (John 3:32–34). However, it might easily belong to the neighboring John 3:30, in which John the Baptist declares that he must yield to Jesus ("He must increase, but I must decrease").[28] An even clearer example can be found in the third extant folio, where the *hermēneia* reads: ⲙ̄ⲡ̄ⲣ̄ⲡⲓⲥⲧⲉⲩⲉ ⲉⲩϣⲁ[ⲭⲉ ⲛ̄ϣⲙ̄]ⲙⲟ / [μη] πιστευσης αλλοτρ[ιω λογω], "Don't trust a stranger's words." This has nothing to do with the verse that it accompanies (John 10:11), but it goes very well with the nearby John 10:5: "[Sheep] will not follow a stranger (ἀλλοτρίῳ), but they will run from him because they do not know the voice of strangers (τῶν ἀλλοτρίων τῶν φωνήν)."[29] The connection is established both through overlap in sense and through common vocabulary. There is a suspicion, therefore, that the lack of correspondence in some cases might be due to the fact that the oracles have been displaced slightly from their original context.

This examination of the papyrus and parchment fragments has yielded a complicated verdict. On several occasions, the *hermēneiai* are intimately connected with their gospel passages through subject matter and/or vocabulary, in effect translating them into a more recognizably oracular idiom. On other occasions, the connections are less obvious but not impossible. On

26 "Two Coptic Papyri," 174–75 (van Haelst, *Catalogue*, no. 1124).

27 Oddly, Crum does not fill the lacunae in this case, but the suppletions provided here are all but certain (the surviving portions of the Coptic and Greek sentences are mutually informing).

28 Cf. Bezae, no. 41 (αποταξαι). This appears at a spot in the series that would line up with John 3:30: no. 42 in Bezae is identical to no. 41 in g1 (John 3:34 ff.); no. 40 in g1 diverges from no. 41 in Bezae, but is aligned with John 3:29–33.

29 Cf. g1, no. 149 (ne credas alienis sermonibus), which is aligned with John 9:17–19.

still other occasions, the *hermēneiai* seem to bear no relationship at all to the biblical text that they accompany. Even in these cases, however, some can be plausibly connected with passages that are nearby. The following hypothesis is the most reasonable way to account for this evidence: (1) the archetype of this system exhibited a strong and consistent correlation between the segmented text of John and the accompanying *hermēneiai*; (2) this original integrity is still observable in some of the surviving fragments; (3) some corruption and dislocation had crept into the manuscript tradition by the sixth or seventh century.[30]

2 Codex Bezae and Codex Sangermanensis 15 (g^1)

This hypothesis can be tested against the evidence from Codex Bezae and Codex Sangermanensis 15 (g^1). On the one hand, the *hermēneiai* in these manuscripts are later than the papyrus and parchment fragments and are therefore likely to be even more corrupt (in fact, this is demonstrably true).[31] On the other hand, these two witnesses are considerably more extensive, raising the possibility that they may preserve series of more than two or three consecutive oracles that can be correlated with consecutive passages from the Gospel of John.

First, however, we must register an observation about the *hermēneiai* that appear both in the fragments discussed above and in g^1. In all such cases, the corresponding oracles appear in approximately the same area vis-à-vis the text of John, but they are never aligned exactly.[32] By way of example, the first extant *hermēneia* in P.Berol. 11914 is aligned with John 3:14–15; this seems to be correct, but the corresponding oracle in g^1 is aligned instead with John 3:12–13 (a shift of two verses). The first one in P.Berol. 3607 + 3623 is aligned with John 5:44–47; again this seems to be logical, but the equivalent in g^1 is aligned with John

30 For consideration of the possibility that the dislocation was intentional, see below.

31 Scrivener, *Bezae Codex Cantabrigiensis*, xxvii–xxviii) seems to date the *hermēneiai* in Bezae to the tenth century. He is followed by Harris. J. Neville Birdsall has said that they cannot be dated on palaeographical grounds and suggests that they may belong to what he identifies as the 'Greek period' of the manuscript's history, in the seventh and eighth centuries; see Birdsall, "The Geographical and Cultural Origin of the Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis: A Survey of the Status Quaestionis, Mainly from the Paleographical Standpoint," in *Studien zum Text und zur Ethik des Neuen Testaments: Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Heinrich Greeven*, ed. W. Schrage (Berlin: de Gruyter 1986), 102–14, at 114. David C. Parker, *Codex Bezae: An Early Christian Manuscript and Its Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 43–44, dates them to the period 550–650.

32 Harris does not record the location of oracles in g1 in relation to the gospel text. The reports in this chapter are based on my own examination of the manuscript.

5:28–29 (a shift of sixteen verses). In the case of the bilingual fragment from Antinoë (Paris, BnF Copte 156), "Don't trust a stranger's words" seems quite clearly to go with John 10:5. In the fragment, however, it is aligned with John 10:11, and in g^1 the equivalent is associated with John 9:17–19 (a shift of six verses in the former case and of twenty-seven verses in the other direction in the latter case). All of this demonstrates that displacement of oracles within the system has indeed occurred and that it is more pervasive and extensive in g^1 than in the fragments. This observation may tend to lower expectations about what can be proven on the basis of the two intact biblical codices. If, however, we allow for the likelihood of displacement, we may still be able to find entire blocks of oracles that can be correlated with consecutive passages from the Gospel of John.

The obvious place to start the inquiry is at the beginning of the system, where the Greek *hermēneiai* from Bezae (which were copied out of context in the lower margins of the Gospel of Mark) can be correlated with the Latin oracles from g^1 and used to fill in the gaps in the Latin witness.[33] Unfortunately, however, while Bezae is more complete, it appears to be unredeemably corrupt at the very beginning. I was unable to find a meaningful sequence of consecutive *hermēneiai* that clearly correspond to a continuous sequence of passages in John 1. This is not to say, however, that the investigation was entirely fruitless. There are individual oracles from the beginning of the system that can be plausibly connected with the beginning of the Gospel. For example:

> John 1:3–4a. "All things came into being (ἐγένετο) through him, and without him not one thing came into being (ἐγένετο). What has come into being (ὃ γέγονεν) in him was life."
>
> *Hermēneia*: ***το γηνωμενον*** τελϊουτε (Bezae, no. 2) = ***q(uo)d fit*** co(m)plebitu(r) (g^1, no. 2); "What has come into being will be fulfilled."
>
> John 1:4. "What has come into being in him was life (ζωή), and the life (ζωή) was the light of all people."
>
> *Hermēneia*: περϊ ***ζωης*** (Bezae, no. 5); "Concerning life …"[34]
>
> John 1:9. "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world."
>
> *Hermēneia*: ου δυνϊ ψευσασθεν (Bezae, no. 9); "You cannot be deceived."

33 The frequent gaps in g^1, and the obvious corruption throughout, render it difficult to find continuity after the supplementary evidence from Bezae breaks off (at roughly John 5:30).

34 Either this oracle is incomplete or it is not an oracle at all. Harris, *Annotators*, 59, suggests that it may have been a heading.

John 1:12. "But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power (ἐξουσίαν) to become the children of God."

Hermēneia: δυναμιν μεγαλϊν προσδοκα (Bezae, no. 12); "Expect great power (a great miracle)."

John 1:16a. "From his fullness we have all received (ἐλάβομεν), grace upon grace (χάριν ἀντὶ χάριτος)."

Hermēneia: ***λανβασϊν*** τϊν ***χαρϊν*** *εκ* θυ (Bezae, no. 13); "You will receive grace from God."

Because some extraneous material intervenes, this sequence is not perfect. Nevertheless, these *hermēneiai* are in order and exhibit clear correspondences (through common theme and vocabulary) with progressive verses from the prologue of John. This is unlikely to be accidental. The imperfections, therefore, are probably to be explained once again as the result of dislocation.

In fact, some *hermēneiai* that appear later in Bezae and g^1 were almost certainly displaced from their proper context earlier in the system. This is the case, for example, with two oracles that correspond to the words of John the Baptist in the middle of chapter 1:

John 1:20. "He confessed (ὡμολόγησεν) and did not deny it (οὐκ ἠρνήσατο), but confessed (ὡμολόγησεν), 'I am not the Messiah.'"

Hermēneia: ***μϊ απαρνϊση*** αλλ ***ομολωγϊσον*** (Bezae, no. 64) = ***ne abneges*** sed ***profiteris*** (g^1, no. 62); "Don't deny, but confess."

John 1:23. "I am the voice of one crying out in the wilderness, 'Make straight the way (εὐθύνατε τὴν ὁδόν) of the Lord,' as the prophet Isaiah said."

Hermēneia: ***ορθϊος την ωδον*** βεβεουτε σου το πραγμα (Bezae, no. 49); "You will make straight the way; your affair is secure."

These two examples strike me as so obvious that they virtually compel one to accept that the *hermēneiai* were once closely connected with the biblical text but have sometimes been displaced from their proper setting.

We have managed, therefore, to uncover some evidence in Bezae and g^1 that supports the hypothesis advanced in this chapter, but we have still not found the very thing that would confirm it beyond all doubt, namely, a continuous series of *hermēneiai* that corresponds to continuous text from the Gospel of John. I believe, however, that there is just such a sequence in the early verses of John 2:

John 2:5–7. Jesus' mother tells servants at the wedding in Cana to follow her son's directions; they fill six large containers with water.

Hermēneia: τεληουμενον παρυμα καλον (Bezae, no. 22) = perfectu(m) opus (g^1, no. 22); "A (good) work has been completed."

John 2:8–9. Jesus changes the water into wine and the steward is perplexed.

Hermēneia: απροσδοκητον παρυμα γηνομενον (Bezae, no. 23); "Something unexpected has happened."

John 2:10–11. "Everyone serves the good (καλόν) wine first, and then the inferior wine after the guests have become drunk. But you have kept the good (καλόν) wine until now." The disciples "believed" (ἐπίστευσαν).

Hermēneia: ***πιστευσον*** οτη το παργμα ***καλον*** εστιν (Bezae, no. 24) = ***credere*** <q>uia causa ***bona*** e(st) (g^1, no. 24); "Believe that the matter is good."

John 2:12. After "this" (τοῦτο), Jesus and his disciples went to Capernaum and "remained" (ἔμειναν) there for a few days.

Hermēneia: εαν ποης ***τουτω*** το ***παραμινον*** και ευξε το θεο (Bezae, no. 25) = si facies ***istut*** (*l.* istud) ***permane*** (g^1, no. 25); "If you do this, remain steadfast (and pray to God)."

John 2:13. Jesus went from Capernaum to Jerusalem.

Hermēneia: δηαχορϊσϊς (Bezae, no. 26); "A separation."[35]

John 2:14–17. Jesus went to the Temple, where he found people selling animals and changing money; he drove them out and "overturned" (ἀνέτρεψεν) their tables.

Hermēneia: αποταξε και ***αποστρεψον*** (Bezae, no. 27) = accede et ***averte*** (g^1, no. 26); "Yield and turn back."

John 2:18–22. Jesus responds to a request for a sign: "Destroy (λύσατε) this temple, and in three days (τρισὶν ἡμέραις) I will raise it up."

Hermēneia: ***δηαλυσϊς*** μετα ***τρϊς ημερα*** γϊνετε (Bezae, no. 28) = ***absolveris*** post ***tres dies*** (g^1, no. 27); "There will be a resolution (or you will be absolved) after three days."

John 2:23–25. Many "believed" (ἐπίστευσαν), but Jesus "did not entrust" (οὐκ ἐπίστευεν) himself to them.

35 This is an especially laconic oracle, but it resembles another one that corresponds to a transition in the gospel narrative, when nothing much is said or done other than Jesus' departure (P.Berol. 3607: διαλυσις γινε[ται, accompanying John 6:1–2); see above for discussion. On the other hand, this brief entry in Bezae has no counterpart in g^1 and, in fact, disrupts the harmony that had existed in the numbering of the two. There is a possibility, then, that this is not a genuine *hermēneia*.

Hermēneia: ***ne credas*** alienis sermonibus (g^1, no. 28); "Don't trust a stranger's words."[36]

Here we have a series of seven or eight consecutive *hermēneiai* that can be plausibly correlated with continuous text from the Gospel. Moreover, this sequence in g^1 has not been dislodged from its proper location, or at least not by much. It begins in the manuscript at John 2:6 (g^1, no. 22) and extends down to John 2:20 (g^1, no. 28) – almost precisely what I have proposed as a logical correlation.

A similar sequence, but with some minor imperfections and dislocation, can be discerned in John 3.[37]

John 3:7–10. Jesus tells Nicodemus not to be astonished at the statement that he must be born from above. Nicodemus wonders how this can be.

Hermēneia: απροσδωκῖτον παραυγμα (Bezae, no. 33) = insperata causa perficitur (g^1, no. 31); "Something unexpected (will be accomplished)."

John 3:11–12. "Very truly, I tell you (ἀμην ἀμην λέγω), we speak (λαλοῦμεν) of what we know …"

Hermēneia: ***quod verum est dicito*** (g^1, no. 32); "Speak the truth."[38]

John 3:13–15. "Just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in him may have eternal life."

Hermēneia: gloria magna (g^1, no. 34) = δοξα μεγαλη γινεται / ⲟⲩⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲛⲟϭ ⲛ̄ⲉⲟⲟⲩ ⲛⲁϣⲱⲡⲉ (P.Berol. 11914); "(There will be) great glory."[39]

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36 As is frequently the case, Harris' transcription (*Annotators*, 61) is not accurate here. He records the number of this entry as *xxviii* (which he suggests should be read as *xxix*) and prints the entire oracle as follows: *ne credas alienis sermonibus; poenitere d*(*e*)*o et fiet*, "Don't trust a stranger's words; repent to God and it will happen." In fact, however, the first clause (*ne credas alienis sermonibus*) is numbered *xviii* (18) but should clearly read *xxviii* (28) and has no parallel in Bezae. The second clause – *poenitere d*(*e*)*o et fiet* – is a distinct oracle with its own number (*xxviiii* = 29) and corresponds exactly to no. 29 in Bezae (μετανωησον το θω και γηνετε).

37 Like the previous sequence, this one appears in g^1 in a position that is very close to what I am proposing for a logical correlation with the biblical text. The first oracle from g^1 (no. 31) is aligned in the manuscript with John 3:3–6 (I suggest John 3:7–10 as the proper position). The last oracle given here (no. 38) is aligned with John 3:19–21 (I suggest John 3:22–24).

38 This oracle is lacking in Bezae. The next one (Bezae, no. 34 = g^1, no. 33) is slightly displaced; it appears to belong with John 3:19–20 (see below).

39 At this point in Bezae, the bottom of a folio has been cut away and two *hermēneiai* are lacking (Harris numbers the missing oracles 35 and 36). The *sors* from g^1, however, can be correlated with a parchment fragment (P.Berol. 11914) in which this *hermēneia* is

John 3:16–18. Among other things, God did not send his Son to condemn the world.

Hermēneia: περι ελεγξεως παυσει μη ποιηση / ⲉⲧⲃⲉ ⲟⲩϫⲡⲓⲟ ϩⲣⲟⲕ ⲙ̄ⲡⲣ̄ⲁⲁϥ (P.Berol. 11914); "Concerning rebuke, stop; don't do it."

John 3:19–20. Those who do evil avoid the light, so that their deeds may not be "exposed" (ἐλεγχθῇ).

Hermēneia: εαν ψυση ***ελεγχουσιν*** σε (Bezae, no. 34) = si mentiris ***arguent*** te (g[1], no. 33); "If you lie, you will be exposed."

John 3:21. Those who pursue the "truth" (ἀλήθειαν) come into the light.

Hermēneia: περι δηκϊς εαν ***αλϊθευσϊς*** ευλυτ…… (Bezae, no. 37) = de iudicio ***quod verum est*** si dixeris liber eris (g[1], no. 36); "In matters of law, if you tell the truth, you will be free."[40]

John 3:22–24. Jesus and his disciples "went" (ἦλθεν) into the Judean countryside.

Hermēneia: ad peregrinatione(m) itineris ***venies*** (g[1], no. 38); "You are about to go on a journey abroad."

John 3:25–26. A "discussion" (ζήτησις) arose about purification.

Hermēneia: το ***ζητϊς*** προφθανϊ σε (Bezae, no. 39); "You already have what you seek."[41]

John 3:27–28. John the Baptist: "No one can receive anything except what has been given from heaven (δεδομένον ἐκ τοῦ οὐρανοῦ)."

Hermēneia: τουτο ***εκ θευ δοτον*** εστιν (Bezae, no. 40); "This is a gift from God."

Smaller sequences of this sort can be spotted here and there in these two codices, but it is not my intention in this chapter to reconstruct as much as possible of the original system (perhaps a fool's errand in any case, given the state of our sources). Enough evidence has already been assembled here to draw a firm conclusion. Despite the very significant imperfections in these manuscripts, vestiges of an original logic remain. The *hermēneiai* were indeed a running commentary on the Gospel of John, but a commentary designed to aid the bibliomancer in extracting divinatory wisdom from the biblical text.

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associated with John 3:13–15; see also the next entry, and see above for discussion of this fragment.

40 The *hermēneia* fits very well with this passage, but it is an even better fit for John 8:32 and may have been repeated there in the archetype.

41 A good example of linkage based on vocabulary without any connection to the subject matter of the biblical passage.

3 The Archetype and Its Corruption

If the thesis argued in this chapter is correct, then the archetype of this oracular system, which was perhaps created in the fifth or sixth century, was both logical and intricate.[42] The entire Gospel of John was divided into segments of 1–5 verses, each accompanied by a *hermēneia* that translated the language and/or subject matter of the biblical passage into a personal fortune.

If this is the case, then how did the *hermēneiai* frequently come to be dislodged from their proper passages? I have been assuming up to this point that corruption was to blame, but there are in fact two possible explanations: either the displacement was intentional or it was unintentional. One might imagine that it was done intentionally in order to obscure the process of consultation and interject a further element of mystery. In this case, once the passage was consulted, only the diviner would know where to look for the corresponding interpretation. There are analogues for this sort of intentional obfuscation in oracular literature, most notably in the Sortes Astrampsychi, in which an ingenious shift gives the false impression that a random process resulted in a relevant answer to the question posed.[43] There are, however, at least three reasons to think that the Johannine *hermēneiai* were not intentionally displaced in this manner. First, the degree and direction of displacement are unpredictable; this means that the appropriate oracle could only be located with a key of some sort, no trace of which exists. Second, when the fragments overlap with g^1, the displacement is never identical (as explained at the beginning of the previous section). Third, in our earliest sources, the biblical passages and *hermēneiai* do in fact line up more often than not (as documented above, in the section on the papyrus and parchment fragments). It stands to reason, therefore, that the archetype exhibited this sort of close correspondence throughout, and that the displacement of *hermēneiai* resulted from corruption of the system in the process of transmission.

On the face of it, it is hardly surprising that this might have happened. It requires no great knowledge of manuscripts to recognize that repeated copying over time tends to result in the proliferation of errors and discrepancies. This is especially true of oracular literature, which is disjointed by its very nature and almost invites the copyist to make changes or substitutions according

42 The only clues to the date of the archetype are the palaeographical dates of the fragments. These are very insecure, but they cluster in the sixth and seventh centuries (see the table below).

43 See chapter one in this volume.

to whim.[44] If, therefore, a scribe failed to perceive the integral relationship between each *hermēneia* and its gospel text, he or she might have thought that nothing was to be lost (or even that everything was to be gained) by shifting some material around.

This explanation only goes so far in this case, however, because our earliest witnesses are characterized by a *mise en page* that would appear to minimize, or even eliminate, any temptation to alter the system. Each page of the papyrus and parchment fragments contains one discreet passage of John and one oracular *hermēneia*. As a result, the scribe would have to go to extreme lengths to make major changes to his or her exemplar. Occasional substitutions would still be relatively easy, but displacing entire blocks of *hermēneiai* from their proper position would be difficult. And yet, while some of the papyrus and parchment fragments appear to preserve the system's original integrity, at least in places, others seem to exhibit fairly significant examples of dislocation. How can that be?

This is a matter for speculation only, but it may be that the system of *hermēneiai* did not originate in a nicely segmented text like we see in the surviving fragments. Perhaps, for example, an existing manuscript of John was divided into numbered segments and a list of numbered *hermēneiai* was appended. Or perhaps they were written into the margins of an existing manuscript. In the latter case, the archetype would have resembled the layout of g^1 more than anything else. In either of these scenarios, widespread corruption and displacement of the oracles could have occurred immediately. In fact, one wonders whether the very restrictive format attested in the fragments was an innovation designed precisely to preserve the system's integrity (or what remained of it). In the end, however, this is merely a guess. Only the appearance of an independent list of our oracles or an early manuscript of John with marginal *hermēneiai* could confirm it.

44 Frequent substitution and corruption are clear, for example, in the multiple manuscript witnesses to the Sortes Sanctorum (incipit "Post solem surgunt stellae"), on which see especially William E. Klingshirn, "Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*: Gibbon, Du Cange, and Early Christian Lot Divination," *JECS* 10 (2002): 77–130. The degree of substitution and corruption can be surveyed quickly by consulting the critical edition of Enrique Montero Cartelle, *Les* Sortes sanctorum: *Étude, édition critique et traduction* (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013).

4 The Manner of Consultation

The final topic to be treated here is the divinatory method or technique used to consult these oracles. The evidence is very slender. Two of the fragments preserve consecutive numbers on consecutive pages.[45] The sequences in these two cases do not seem to line up very well with each other, but it appears probable that the Johannine passages and accompanying *hermēneiai* in both of these manuscripts were numbered sequentially from John 1:1 to the end of the Gospel.[46] The same is also quite clearly true of g^1. As this is the only system of numbering found in these manuscripts, and as the numbers extend well beyond six, it appears that the divinatory method did not involve the casting of dice, which was a common randomizing technique in the consultation of Christian oracle books. Nor does the evidence suggest some other complicated method of consultation, as found, for example, in the Sortes Astrampsychi or the Sortes Sangallenses. Perhaps, then, the inquirer would merely pick a random number between one and 316 (or however many oracles were in the complete series). Or simpler yet, perhaps the numbers are irrelevant and the inquirer would arrive at his or her passage merely by opening the book at random. This, after all, was typical of bibliomantic uses of the Bible.[47]

While either of these methods is possible, at least in some iterations of the system, there is evidence in g^1 for something different. On fol. 89*b*, a circle divided into eight segments, each crammed with non-consecutive numbers, is apparently associated with the numbered oracles in the margins of the Gospel of John (fig. 4.4).[48]

This was spotted already by Harris, who speculated that its purpose was to facilitate the selection of a number corresponding to one's fate. This much seems reasonably certain, but, as Harris also noted, the obvious imperfections, both in the wheel of numbers and in the marginal *sortes*, obscure the precise logic.[49] Perhaps, before the system was corrupted, each segment of such a

45 P.Berol. 3607 + 3623; P.Berol. 11914 (Stegmüller, "Zu den Bibelorakeln," 15–19).

46 Of course, these could simply be page numbers in each manuscript, in which case the lack of correspondence between the two might be explained by the fact that one or both contained other material preceding the Gospel of John.

47 For a survey of relevant evidence, see Pieter W. van der Horst, "*Sortes*: Sacred Books as Instant Oracles in Late Antiquity," in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. Leonard V. Rutgers (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 143–73.

48 Harris, "'Sortes Sanctorum' in the St. Germain Codex," 60–61 (= Harris, *Codex Bezae*, 8–9); Metzger, "Greek Manuscripts of John's Gospel," 166.

49 This corruption indicates that the wheel was copied from an earlier source; Harris, "'Sortes Sanctorum' in the St. Germain Codex," 61 (= Harris, *Codex Bezae*, 9). Whether it goes all the way back to the archetype is impossible to determine at present.

FIGURE 4.4 Paris, BnF Lat. 11553, fol. 89v (detail)
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wheel would have corresponded to a general topic (health, travel, legal affairs, etc.) and each number within it would have corresponded to a relevant fortune. After choosing a topic, the inquirer might have arrived at his or her *sors* by casting a small object into the appropriate segment of the wheel. Or perhaps this is an early (and now incomplete) example of a *volvelle* – concentric circles, one inscribed on the page and the other(s) capable of being rotated.[50] This book technology was used for calculating such things as the date of Easter or the movements of the planets, but also, significantly, for the purpose of

50 Michelle Gravelle, Anah Mustapha, and Coralee Leroux, "Volvelles" (http://drc.usask.ca/projects/archbook/volvelles.php). This was suggested to me by William Klingshirn.

fate-telling.[51] The earliest clear examples of *volvelles* date to the thirteenth century, but the wheel in g^1 might suggest that this technology developed somewhat earlier. Whatever the case may be, there is evidence in this manuscript for a method of consultation that was a little more complicated than simply opening the Gospel at random.

5 Conclusion

A correct understanding of the *hermēneiai* associated with John's Gospel has been hindered by the state of our evidence: several small fragments, two or three of which contain instances of corruption, and two later witnesses that are more extensive but marred by significant corruption and displacement. I hope, however, that it is now clear how this oracular system would have functioned before its integrity was compromised. The *hermēneiai* were an aid to bibliomancy. Anyone wishing to inquire into his or her fate would arrive by some means at a passage of John and then consult the accompanying interpretation, which translated the language and/or content of the biblical text into an oracular statement, prediction, or command.

It is not difficult to divine why such a system would have been desirable. When St. Augustine randomly consulted the Epistles of St. Paul looking for wisdom applicable to his situation, his success was not in doubt.[52] He landed on a passage that struck him as highly relevant ("Not in drunkenness …"), but his intelligence and imagination guaranteed that even the most banal passage could have been turned to a useful purpose. If, however, an inquirer of merely average talents landed, for example, on John 6:1 ("After this Jesus went to the other side of the Sea of Galilee …"), he or she might have been at a loss to discover the personal message. The system of oracular 'interpretations' discussed in this chapter offered a way forward for the stymied bibliomancer.

In fact, there are more or less exact ancient and medieval analogues for the system reconstructed here. The Byzantine *Riktologion*, for example, exhibits precisely the same structure (including even the use of the introductory formula *hermēneia*) for a series of non-consecutive biblical passages.[53] In the

51 T. C. Skeat, "An Early Mediaeval 'Book of Fate': The Sortes XII Patriarcharum, with a note on 'Books of Fate' in general," *MRSt*(*L*) 3 (1954): 41–54, at 49.

52 Augustine, *Conf.* 8.12.29.

53 Franz Drexl, "Ein griechisches Losbuch," *ByzZ* 41 (1941): 311–18; Paul Canart and Rosario Pintaudi, "PSI XSII Congr. 5: Un système d'oracles chrétiens ('sortes sanctorum')," *ZPE* 57 (1984): 85–90. Cf. G. A. Megas, "Ριπτολόγιον ἐξ Ἀμοργοῦ," Ἐπιστημονικὴ Ἐπετηρὶς τῆς Φιλοσοφικῆς Σχολῆς τοῦ Πανεπιστημίου Ἀθηνῶν II 9 (1958–1959): 207–16.

case of Homeric epic, more than one type of tool was developed to facilitate bibliomancy, including oracular scholia that are closely analogous to the *hermēneiai* studied here.[54] And in Jewish circles, the *pesharim*, 'interpretations,' from Qumran seem to function, at least in part, as divinatory glosses on the Hebrew Scriptures.[55] The Johannine *hermēneiai* can now take their proper place within a broad (but still poorly understood) tradition of bibliomantic "commentary" on sacred literature.

Appendix: Manuscripts of John's Gospel with *Hermēneiai*[56]

	van Haelst	Nestle-Aland	Language	Century
Papyrus and parchment fragments studied above:				
P.Berol. 3607 + 3623	443	0210	Greek	VII
P.Berol. 11914	438	𝔓[63]	Greek/Coptic	VI
P.Ness. 2.3	429	𝔓[59]	Greek	VI[a]
P.Monts.Roca 83 (P.Barc. 83)	441	𝔓[80]	Greek	VI[b]
Paris, BnF Copte 156	1124		Greek/Coptic	VI
von Soden 1902: XI (lost)	445	0145	Greek	VII
Fragments of the same class but with no usable data for the present study:				
P.Berol. 21315		0302	Greek/Coptic	VI
P.CtYBR 4641[e]			Coptic	V–VII
P.Ness. 2.4	460	𝔓[60]	Greek	VII
PSI 1, p. VI (lost)[d]	1172		Greek	?
PSI 13.1364	1177		Greek	IV–V?
P.Vindob. G 26084	446	0256	Greek	VIII
P.Vindob. G 26214	433	𝔓[55]	Greek	VII
P.Vindob. G 36102	442	𝔓[76]	Greek	VI

54 See the contribution in this volume by Michael Meerson.

55 I owe this insight to Matthew Neujahr.

56 An updated version of the lists in van Haelst, *Catalogue*, 158; Kurt Treu, "P.Berol. 21315: Bibelorakel mit griechischer und koptischer Hermeneia," *APF* 37 (1991): 55–60, at 60. The data for language and century pertain to the oracular sentences, not the gospel text. Occasionally the text is monolingual and the *hermēneiai* are bilingual (or vice versa), and occasionally the hermēneiai were added by a later hand.

	van Haelst	Nestle-Aland	Language	Century
Intact manuscripts:				
Codex Bezae Cantabrigiensis		D (05)	Greek	VII–IX?
Paris, BnF Lat. 11553 (Sangermanensis 15)		g^1 (7)	Latin	VIII–IX
BL Add. 17119			Syriac	VI–VII
Graz, Universität 2058/2[e]			Armenian	VIII
Yerevan, Matenadaran 9650			Armenian	XI

a Given as VII in the *editio princeps*, but see Guglielmo Cavallo, *Il calamo e il papiro: la scrittura greca dall'età ellenistica ai primi secoli di bisanzio*, Papyrologica Florentina 36 (Florence: Firenze Gonnelli, 2005), 197.

b Given as III–IV in the *editio princeps*, but see Pasquale Orsini and Willy Clarysse, "New Testament Manuscripts and Their Dates: A Critique of Theological Palaeography," *ETL* 88 (2012): 443–74, at 459–60, 471 (table).

c Brice C. Jones, "A Coptic Fragment of the Gospel of John with *Hermeneiai*," *NTS* 60 (2014): 202–14.

d A single *hermēneia* quoted in isolation; no proper edition of the fragment appeared.

e This and the following are reported by Bernard Outtier, "Les *prosermeneiai* du Codex Bezae," in *Codex Bezae: Studies from the Lunel Colloquium, June 1994*, ed. David C. Parker and C.-B. Amphoux (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 74–78. Outtier also lists some Armenian and Georgian Psalters with analogous oracular systems.

CHAPTER 5

Hermeneutics and Divination: a Unique Syriac Biblical Manuscript as an Oracle of Interpretation

Jeff W. Childers[1]

Near the end of his exegetical Homily 43 on 1 Corinthians, John Chrysostom exhorts his listeners: "Let us make a little chest for the poor at home, and put it near the place where you stand praying. As often as you come in to pray, first deposit your alms, then send up your prayer …" Apparently, Chrysostom believes that few things enhance Christian prayers the way almsgiving can. But he is well aware that many in his congregation have a different practice, as he goes on to intimate:

> Not even the Gospel hanging by your bed is more important than your laying up of alms, for if you hang up the Gospel and do nothing, it will not do you so much good. But if you have this little coffer, you have a defense against the devil and you give your prayer wings …
>
> *Hom. 1 Cor*. 43.4 [PG 61:472]

Apparently, some people in Chrysostom's congregation were in the practice of hanging up gospel books near their beds in order to give their nightly devotionals a powerful boost.[2] His references attest to a mantic use of Scripture that must have been fairly common practice in his day, at least in some Christian circles. We know that many Christians in late antiquity believed that the artifacts carrying the biblical texts – codices and even scraps of papyrus or parchment – were themselves vehicles of spiritual power.[3] Although he does

1 An earlier version of this chapter was presented in the Program Unit "Religious World of Late Antiquity: *The Materiality of Texts/the Word as Object*" at the annual conference of the Society of Biblical Literature, Chicago, 20 November 2011. I am indebted to those who offered helpful comments and suggestions in that meeting.

2 See Reiner Kaczynski, *Das Wort Gottes in Liturgie und Alltag der Gemeinden des Johannes Chrysostomus*, FThSt 49 (Freiburg: Herder, 1974), 326–29.

3 Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1995), 237–40; David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 268.

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not explicitly condemn the practice, Chrysostom here, as elsewhere,[4] makes clear his preference that people should internalize and embody the teachings of the biblical text rather than use sacred textual objects as amulets or charms.

Late antique Christian belief in the transcendent power of sacred textual objects resulted in the production and use of biblical texts in formats that do not conform simply to the conventional needs of traditional liturgy, exegesis, or mere devotional reading. Amulets represent one type of example. Another type is to be found in the monument of a Syriac Peshitta manuscript of John's Gospel, copied in the sixth or seventh century: London BL Add MS 17119.[5] Its well-written estrangelo text is simply that of the Peshitta, the standard Syriac version of the Bible,[6] containing the entire gospel text. Yet throughout the text, the narrative repeatedly breaks into another voice, with striking exclamations, declarations, and exhortations, interrupting the normal flow of the text. These are rubricated, yet they occur within the text column as part of the normal line flow, in the same hand as the rest of the biblical text (see fig. 5.1).

So in the middle of Jesus' teaching, or a story about one of the signs, the text will suddenly enjoin, "Do not do this that you are about to do" (fol. 34r), or declare, "Great glory will happen" (fol. 9r). Some of the statements are encouraging, but many of them rather foreboding, and at first glance they appear to have little to do with the gospel narrative. When I first encountered this manuscript, conducting research into another matter in the British Library, the true nature of this unusual phenomenon was not immediately apparent to me. Occupied with other things and having only limited time, I recorded many of the statements for future reference, then followed the advice that crops up in the middle of Jesus' conversation with the Jewish leaders at John 2:17, "Leave it alone and turn aside" (fol. 7r).

Some years later, David C. Parker's study of Greek *hermēneia* manuscripts of John's Gospel supplied the stimulus I needed to appreciate the true significance of BL Add MS 17119.[7] These are fragments of parts of John that include oracular answers to questions in the margins. Some are entirely Greek, but others have *hermēneiai* in both Greek and Coptic beneath the biblical text, and at least

4 E.g. *Hom. Jo.* 32.3 (PG 59:217); *Stat.* 19.14 (PG 49:196).

5 For details about the manuscript, see William Wright, *Catalogue of Syriac Manuscripts in the British Museum Acquired since the Year 1838* (London: Trustees of the British Museum, 1870), 1:71. Wright did not recognize the nature of the *sortes* embedded in this manuscript (see below).

6 R. B. ter Haar Romeny and C. E. Morrison, "Peshitta," in *Encyclopedic Dictionary of the Syriac Heritage*, ed. Sebastian P. Brock et al. (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2011), 326–31.

7 David C. Parker, "Manuscripts of John's Gospel with *Hermeneiai*," in *Transmission and Reception: New Testament Text-Critical and Exegetical Studies*, ed. Jeff W. Childers and David C. Parker, TS 3.4 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2006), 48–68.

FIGURE 5.1 London BL Add MS 17119, fols. 6v–7r. © The British Library Board (Add. 17119 Syriac)
IMAGE USED BY PERMISSION OF THE BRITISH LIBRARY

one manuscript is entirely in Coptic.[8] They are called *hermēneiai* because the oracles are typically prefaced by the Greek term *hermēneia*, i.e. 'interpretation.'[9] They constitute a distinct subset of materials believed to have been used in any of various practices of divination. They are not plain expositions of the

8 This manuscript was identified recently: Brice C. Jones, "A Coptic Fragment of the Gospel of John with *Hermeneiai* (P.CtYBR inv. 4641)," *NTS* 60 (2014): 202–14.

9 Bruce M. Metzger, "Greek Manuscripts of John's Gospel with 'Hermeneiai,'" in *Text and Testimony: Essays on New Testament and Apocyphal Literature in Honour of A. F. J. Klijn*, ed. Tjitze Baarda et al. (Kampen: J. H. Kok, 1988), 162–69.

biblical text, nor are they derived from biblical commentaries or homilies.[10] They do not have obvious liturgical functions.[11] Without providing much direct information about the method by which particular oracles were selected, or just how the relationship between the oracles and the accompanying biblical texts were conceived, the *hermēneiai* are seen to fit within the broad category of tools used for sortilege – i.e., decision-making and fortune-telling by means of casting lots (*sortes*).

A number of *hermēneia* documents involving portions of John's Gospel are known to survive as such. In his study, Kevin Wilkinson conducts research on a selection of these materials. Comparing the contents and sequences of a number of the *hermēneiai* in the fragmentary Johannine papyri and parchments in codex Bezae and in the Latin Sangermanensis 15, Wilkinson confirms their close interrelationships.[12] He furthermore reinforces the conventional understanding of them as essentially divinatory in nature. A quick comparison between the surviving *hermēneiai* and the unusual material in BL Add MS 17119 reveals immediately that the latter manuscript was executed as a Syriac tool for biblical divination, very similar to the known *hermēneiai*.

Various means of sortilege have used the biblical text.[13] In this particular manifestation, the accompanying oracles constitute part of a bibliomantic system of divination by which an inquirer received answers to a specific question in the form of an oracle keyed to the biblical text. For example, folios 6v and 7r contain the Peshitta text of John 2:9–22. Yet they also include oracular

10 Stanley E. Porter denies the oracular function, preferring to emphasize an exegetical or interpretive function for these tools; see Porter, "The Use of Hermeneia and Johannine Papyri Manuscripts," in *Akten des 23. Internationalen Papyrologen-Kongresses*, ed. Bernhard Palme, Papyrologica Vindobonensia 1 (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2007), 573–78; Porter, "What Do We Know and How Do We Know It? Reconstructing Early Christianity from its Manuscripts," in *Christian Origins and Greco-Roman Culture. Social and Literary Contexts for the New Testament*, ed. Stanley E. Porter and Andrew W. Pitts, TENTS 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 60–63.

11 Cf. Wally V. Cirafesi, "The Bilingual Character and Liturgical Function of 'Hermeneia' in Johannine Papyrus Manuscripts: A New Proposal," *NovT* 56 (2014): 45–67. Struck by the bilingual nature of some of the *hermēneia* witnesses, Cirafesi proposes that they are liturgical tools for use in bilingual contexts.

12 See Wilkinson, "*Hermêneiai* in Manuscripts of John's Gospel: An Aid to Bibliomancy," in this volume.

13 Pieter W. van der Horst, "*Sortes*: Sacred Books as Instant Oracles in Late Antiquity," in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. Leonard V. Rutgers et al., CBET 22 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 151–59. This type of tool has often been referred to generically, though improperly, as belonging to the *sortes sanctorum*; see William E. Klingshirn, "Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*: Gibbon, Du Cange, and Early Christian Lot Divination," *JECS* 10 (2002): 77–130.

statements written in the same hand, straight into the gospel text, though in red ink. As in the Greek *hermēneia* manuscripts, the term ܦܫܩܐ (*pushshāqā*, 'interpretation') prefaces the statements. The oracles are numbered in the margin.

6v	John 2:11	ܐܡ ܫܦܝܪ ܫܦܝܪܐ ܗܝ ܦܫܩܐ	23
		Interpretation: be assured that the matter is fine.	24
	John 2:13	ܐܢ ܗܟܢܐ ܥܒܕ ܬܬܩܝܡ	25
		If you do this, continue.[14]	
7r	John 2:16	ܡܢ ܕܐ ܫܚܠܦ ܦܫܩܐ	26
		Interpretation: there is dissension/doubt in it.	
	John 2:18	ܣܓܘ ܐܬܪ ܦܫܩܐ	27
		Interpretation: leave and turn.	

The codex once contained 308 of these statements. A few of the original parchment leaves are missing, including the first few, unfortunately.[15] The notes at the end of the manuscript give us a few details about its origin, but not much: it was copied by one George, and at some later time belonged to the Monastery of Silvanus near Damascus (fol. 83r).[16]

The end of the codex also includes a subscription in the original hand that mentions Chrysostom as one who had interpreted John, using the same Syriac root (ܦܫܩ) as in the prefatory term ܦܫܩܐ (*pushshāqā*), 'interpretation,' i.e. *hermēneia*.[17] Is it possible that the ancient scribe mistakenly assumed that the ܦܫܩܐ (*pushshāqē*) of the oracles in John actually related to a particular

14 A few of the oracles lack the prefatory ܦܫܩܐ, including #25, probably through accidental omission.

15 I.e. the first six oracles. The original parchment folios 1–2 have been replaced by paper leaves written in a twelfth-century hand (Wright, *Catalogue*, 1:71–72); they contain only the text of John, no oracles. Folios 63 and 66 have also been replaced, but they have been written in a somewhat earlier hand and include oracles (ܦܫܩܐ, *pushshaqē*) written in the margins, presumably replacing the ones lost with the original leaves. The agent/s responsible for mending the loss of folios 1–2 did not have the same concern to replace missing oracular statements as did the earlier agent/s responsible for repairing the loss of folios 63 and 66.

16 The eighty-three leaf codex measures about 22 cm x 13 cm. The last folio includes a simple colored cross of a type common to Syriac decoration, surrounded by a bold nimbus.

17 ܫܦܝܪ ܗܘ ܕܟܬܒ ܦܫܩܐ ܕ̈ ܝܘܚ̈ܢܢ ܫܠܝܚܐ ܒܪ ܙܒܕܝ ܕܦܫܩܗ ܝܘܚ̈ܢܢ ܐܦܣܩܘܦܐ ܡܕܝܢܬ̈ܐ ܕܩܪܝ̈ܢ ܠܗ ܟܕ ܡܢ ܥܡ̈ܡܐ ܦ̈ܡ ܕܗܘ ܐܦܣܩܘܦܐ ܕܦ̈ܡ, "Ended is the Gospel of John the Apostle, son of Zebedee, which was interpreted by John, Bishop of Constantinople, whom people have customarily called Chrysostom" (fol. 82v). Also, a slightly unusual doxology: ܫܒܚܐ ܠܐܠܗܐ ܒܡܪܘ̈ܡ̈ܐ ܘܫܠܡܐ ܥܠ ܐܪܥܐ ܘܣܒܪ̈ܐ ܛܒ̈ܐ ܒܒ̈ܢܝ ܐܢܫ̈ܐ ܐܡܝܢ, "Praise to God in heaven, and peace on earth, and good hope to people. Amen" (fol. 83r).

celebrated ܦܫܩܩܐ (*pushshāqā*) on John, and added a clarifying subscription to that effect, accidentally connecting Chrysostom to the oracular material? The manuscript's cataloguer, William Wright, made that very mistake in 1870 when he described the manuscript, presuming that the seemingly disconnected reference to Chrysostom in the subscription must relate to the unusual 'interpretive' material in the text of the same manuscript.[18] But given the true and fairly obvious nature of this popular material, and its utter lack of connection with Chrysostom, it seems unlikely that the original scribe would have made such an error. The reference to Chrysostom may have been just incidental.[19] Or was the scribe deliberately trying to sanitize the book? We are reminded of Augustine's mention of this practice. Despite his own use of *sortes biblicae* in the famous garden incident at his conversion, in one epistle we find the comment,

> Regarding those who draw lots from the pages of the Gospel (*de paginis evangelicis sortes legunt*), although it could be wished that they would do this rather than run about consulting demons, I do not like this custom of wishing to turn the divine oracles to worldly business and the vanity of this life, when their object is another life.
>
> AUGUSTINE, *Ep.* 55.37[20]

Although recent scholarship shows that ecclesiastical authorities may not have been as quick to condemn the divinatory consultation of the Bible as scholars once presumed,[21] repeated proscriptions against various kinds of bibliomantic practices suggest both that the popular use of such tools may have been widespread, and that divinatory practices on the part of Christians was met with some ambivalence. For instance, the Syriac Admonitions for the

18 "There are 308 (ܫܡ) rubrics in the volume, referring, as it would seem from the above subscription, to the homilies of John Chrysostom on this Gospel" (Wright, *Catalogue*, 1:71).

19 This conclusion is strengthened by a similar phenomenon in West Syrian Psalters, in which Athanasius' interpretation on the Psalms is mentioned; yet there is no discernable connection between Athanasius' *Commentary on the Psalms* and the material of the Psalter in which the note occurs. See D. G. K. Taylor, "Psalm Headings in the West Syrian Tradition," in *The Peshitta: Its Use in Literature and Liturgy. Papers Read at the Third Peshitta Symposium*, ed. Bas ter Haar Romeny, Monographs of the Peshitta Institute Leiden 15 (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 377. For more on this point, see Jeff W. Childers, "Chrysostom in Syriac Dress," in *Studia patristica LXVII: Papers Presented at the Sixteenth International Conference on Patristic Studies held in Oxford 2011*, vol. 15: *Cappadocian Writers, The Second Half of the Fourth Century*, ed. Markus Vinzant (Leuven: Peeters, 2013), 323–32.

20 Cited from Gamble, *Books and Readers*, 240.

21 See especially Klingshirn, "Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*," 81–84, 122–28.

Monks 19, attributed to Rabbula, bishop of Edessa (411–435), says: "Let none of the monks take an oracle (ܦܬܓܡܐ) out of a book for any one."[22] Similarly, the very first canon in the list of rules attributed to Jacob of Edessa († 708) has: "It is unlawful for a monk to take an oracle (ܦܬܓܡܐ) from the Gospel, or from David, or from the portions [ܦܬܝܬ; lots] that are called 'of the Apostles.'"[23] As ascetic seers came to replace traditional oracles in Christian settings, this development was met with occasional criticism and the establishment of regulatory provisions.[24] Similar proscriptions occur in other ecclesial and monastic contexts, such as Charlemagne's ruling in 789 "that no one should presume to cast lots in the Psalter or in the Gospel or in other things, or perform any divinations."[25] Despite these hints that divination using the Bible may have been widespread among Christians in both the East and the West, not many examples of specialized tools for sortilege using Scripture are known to survive, though it is not unlikely that more remain to be identified as such.

The aforementioned *hermēneiai* manuscripts constitute one set of examples. These include such fragments as that designated 𝔓[63] by New Testament textual critics (Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Ägyptische Abteilung, P. 11914). 𝔓[63] is a papyrus document of the fifth or sixth century and contains portions of John 3–4 in Greek. Column 4 has John 4:10, after which the following oracle occurs in Greek and Coptic:[26]

ερμηνια
εα[ν πι]στευσησ χ̣ϙ̣
ρα[σοι γ]ι̣νεται̣

hermēneia: if you believe, there will be joy for you.

ⲉⲕϣⲁⲛⲡⲓⲥⲧⲉⲩⲉ ⲟⲩⲛ̣
[ⲟⲩ ⲣⲁ]ϣⲉ ⲛⲁϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲁ̣ⲕ̣

If you believe, there will be joy for you.

22 Arthur Vööbus, ed., *Syriac and Arabic Documents Regarding Legislation Relative to Syrian Asceticism* (Stockholm: Estonian Theological Society in Exile, 1960), 31.

23 Vööbus, *Syriac and Arabic Documents*, 95.

24 Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 187–95.

25 Duplex Legationis Edictum 20, MGH, capit. 2.1:64. For the reference, along with helpful discussion of the contexts of various proscriptions like these, see Klingshirn, "Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*," 110.

26 The text is taken from Otto Stegmüller, "Zu den Bibelorakeln im Codex Bezae," *Biblica* 34 (1953): 17; see also Metzger, "Greek Manuscripts of John's Gospel with 'Hermeneiai,'" 164.

𝔓63 contains four such *hermēneiai*. Several other fragments and documents like this have been found, from the third and fourth to eighth centuries, having brief portions of John's Gospel.[28] The provenance of most of these fragments is highly uncertain, and the manner of their use as divinatory tools unclear. What is certain is that they point to an early reliance on specific contents of John's Gospel as supplying the context in which to present oracular pronouncements to inquirers, styled as 'interpretations' connected to the biblical text.

One famous set of *hermēneiai* is found in codex Bezae, the bilingual Graeco-Latin copy of the Gospels and Acts.[29] It has sixty-nine such oracles scribbled in rough Greek into the lower margin of Mark's Gospel. The manuscript's main text is from the fifth century, but the *hermēneiai* written beneath the text are later; they have been dated paleographically to as early as 550–650, and as late as the ninth or tenth century.[30] For example, at the bottom of the page containing the Greek of Mark 6:3–13 (fol. 302v), someone has scrawled in Greek, ερμϊνῆα / εαν ψυση ελεγχουσϊν σε, "*Hermeneia*: if you are false, they will accuse you." Scrivener did not recognize the *hermēneiai*, describing them as "moral apophthegms, some of them silly enough,"[31] but their true nature is now clear[32] – even if the precise mechanism of their function remains mysterious.

The parallels between Bezae's oracles and the early ninth-century Sangermanensis primus (Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale lat. 11553, g[1]) have long been recognized.[33] This Latin Bible contains the Gospels, including the text of John. It divides John into 316 sections, 185 of which are accompanied by Latin oracles written into the margins and keyed to the gospel text. Many of them find parallels in Bezae's set, often in the same sequence (though Bezae's are not numbered). For instance, at John 3:8 (fol. 126r), in the middle of Jesus'

27 Metzger, "Greek Manuscripts of John's Gospel with 'Hermeneiai,'", 163–64.

28 Parker surveys six such papyri and two parchment codices ("Manuscripts of John's Gospel with *Hermeneiai*," 48–50). He was not interested in the *hermēneiai* themselves, but wanted to test the value of these artifacts as witnesses to the biblical text.

29 See the codicological study of this manuscript by Parker, *Codex Bezae: An Early Christian Manuscript and its Text* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992).

30 Parker dates the hand to 550–650 (*Codex Bezae*, 43, 49), though Metzger dates it to the ninth or tenth century ("Greek Manuscripts of John's Gospel with 'Hermeneiai,'" 165–66).

31 Frederick H. Scrivener, *Bezae Codex Cantabrigiensis* (Cambridge: Deighton, Bell & Co., 1864), xxvii.

32 J. Rendel Harris, *The Annotators of the Codex Bezae* (London: C. J. Clay & Sons, 1901), 45–74; Stegmüller, "Zu den Bibelorakeln im Codex Bezae," 13–22; Metzger, "Greek Manuscripts of John's Gospel with 'Hermeneiai,'" 165–67; Bernard Outtier, "Les *Prosermeneiai* du Codex Bezae," in *Codex Bezae: Studies from the Lunel Colloquium, June 1994*, ed. David C. Parker and C.-B. Amphoux (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 74–78.

33 J. Rendel Harris, "The 'Sortes Sanctorum' in the St. Germain Codex (*g*1)," *AJP* 9 (1888): 58–63; Harris, *Annotators of the Codex Bezae*, 59–74.

nocturnal conversation with Nicodemus, the following oracle occurs: *xxxiii · si mentiris arguent te*, "33: if you lie, they will accuse you." This oracle is basically identical to oracle number 34 in Bezae discussed above. When we turn to the Syriac gospel (BL Add MS 17119), a few verses down – just after John 3:13 (fol. 8v) – we find the following oracle, number 34:

ܠ ܐܢ ܫܩܝܪ ܐܢܬ ܒܗ ܢܟܚܘܢܟ ܐܝܟ ܕܫܩܝܪ ܐܢܬ ܠܗ

Interpretation: if you are false, they will reprove you. 34

The similarities in content and sequence are obvious, although we are dealing with the same oracle in three different languages. But whereas the oracle is a much later addition to Bezae, and a contemporary but marginal feature of Sangermanensis, here in the Syriac manuscript it has been incorporated straight into the biblical text, in the same hand, at a date earlier than either Sangermanensis or Bezae. The modern reader is struck by the form of this book as we have it – a complete gospel codex representing considerable investment of time and money, with both a fair copy of the Gospel of John and fully integrated divinatory content, not as a marginal or secondary apparatus, but integral to the whole.

The interrelationship of all the material presented so far is further illustrated by the following comparison of four different kinds of witnesses bearing parallel oracles:

𝔓[63]	John 4:10	ερμηνια εα[ν πι]στευσησ χαρα[σοι γ]ἰνεται
	hermēneia	If you believe, there will be joy for you.
		ⲉⲕϣⲁⲛⲡⲓⲥⲧⲉⲩⲉ ⲟⲩⲛ / [ⲟⲩ ⲣⲁ]ϣⲉ ⲛⲁϣⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲁⲕ
		If you have trust, there will be joy for you.
17119	John 4:10	ܠ ܟܐܡ ܟܫܘܪ [34]ܫܬܟ ܐܝܟ ܕܫܩܝܪ ܐܢܬ ܠܟ
		46 Interpretation: if you are convinced, there will be joy for you.
Bezae	Mark 7	(46)[35] ερμἰϋἰα εαν πἰστευσησ χαρα συ εσθω
		hermēneia: if you believe, there will be joy for you

34 The manuscript has ܫܬܟ, 'if you begin,' possibly due to a misreading of ܫܬܟ.

35 In codex Bezae, this oracle is in the forty-sixth position, though the statements are not numbered in Bezae.

Sang.	John 4:4	xliii	*si credideris gloria tibi*
		43	If you believe, (there will be) glory to you.

Obviously the oracular material in all these witnesses draws on an earlier source, which undoubtedly owes much to antecedent pagan materials for *sortilege*. Very likely based on a Greek original, at some point the Syriac oracles were pulled straight into the gospel text, possibly from a marginal apparatus not unlike that found in Sangermanensis. Yet whereas we have a set of only 185 oracles in Sangermanensis, and a very truncated set of sixty-nine in codex Bezae, the Syriac BL Add MS 17119 has 308 oracles (less the first six, due to missing leaves).

That John's Gospel would be the text of choice for such a mystical application is not surprising;[36] numerous examples of the magical use of portions of John occur over the centuries, from the use of its opening 'statements of power' in Syriac healing charms,[37] to Augustine's insistence that it is better for a person with a headache to sleep with a copy of John's Gospel than resort to magical amulets (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 7.12). It is perhaps significant that our Syriac codex contains only the text of John, and not the other Gospels.[38] By comparison, Bezae is unique in having the *hermēneiai* associated with the Gospel of Mark instead – though one ought to remember that Bezae's famously 'Western' order of the Gospels puts Mark in the fourth position, in place of John. Also, Bezae's oracles are a later addition, and they include no numbers or other keys tying the oracles to the gospel text.

Despite the relative completeness of the set of oracles in the Syriac codex, the method by which they were used is unclear. It is possible that the Syriac codex once included a tool by which to guide the divinatory process, like the

36 The Psalms were also used in this fashion, as the canons attributed to Jacob of Edessa and Charlemagne's ruling cited above indicate; see also Outtier, "Les *Prosermeneiai* du Codex Bezae," 77–78; Outtier, "Réponses oraculaires dans des manuscrits bibliques caucasiens," in *Armenia and the Bible*, ed. Christoph Burchard, ArTS 12 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1993), 181–84.

37 See e.g. the manuscripts described in Moshe H. Goshen-Gottstein, *Syriac Manuscripts in the Harvard College Library: A Catalogue*, HSS 23 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979).

38 Cf. the nineteenth-century manuscript, London BL MS Or. 4434, containing a Syriac translation of an Arabic text, in which divinatory statements accompany selected gospel passages. The Gospel of John is most commonly cited, but passages from Luke and Mark also occur; see Giuseppe Furlani, "Un trattato evangelomantico in lingua siriaca," *Giornale della Società Asiatica Italiana* 29 (1919–1920): 71–95. Although its longer and more florid statements bear only passing resemblance to some of the statements in BL Add 17119, the text of Or. 4434 demonstrates the enduring appeal of gospel texts, and especially John, in the construction of elaborate divinatory tools.

one that occurs in Sangermanensis. Prior to its presentation of the Eusebian Canons, Sangermanensis has a wheel, divided into eight sections and filled with a broken series of numbers up to 316 (fol. 89v) – apparently a device to help the diviner select the right response, though the mechanism of its operation is rather inscrutable.[39] Our Syriac gospel codex includes a full set of numbers, but no such device as Sangermanensis' wheel – though one wonders what those missing first leaves may have contained.

The pervasiveness of this cryptic material is amplified when we turn to certain Armenian sources. Much like Sangermanensis, an eleventh-century Armenian gospel manuscript of John includes *hermēneiai* written into the margin (Erevan, Matenadaran 9650).[40] Even more intriguing is the manuscript Graz 2058/2. A palimpsest, the upper writing is that of a Georgian liturgical psalter copied at St. Catharine's monastery at Mt. Sinai in the tenth century. But the underwriting is Armenian, an eighth – or ninth-century text of John's Gospel. Like the Syriac manuscript BL Add MS 17119, this Armenian gospel includes oracles incorporated into the text, though they are set off much more distinctly by large blank spaces and often centered.[41] For instance, at John 4:11–14 (fol. 79r), the Armenian has the following oracle, numbered 48:

48 թե հաւատաս խնդութիւն լինի քեզ
48 If you believe, you (will) have joy.[42]

In content and placement, the oracle is nearly identical to those found in the four other witnesses listed above. Not all the Armenian oracles match those of the Syriac in content or location, but many of them do. The Armenian evidence is fragmentary and difficult to read, yet in style of execution this codex is more like our Syriac manuscript than any of the others because the oracles are incorporated into the flow of the gospel text and written in the same hand. But by the tenth century, the value of the Armenian content was judged to be questionable, and better erased in order to make room for more

39 Harris, "'Sortes Sanctorum' in the St. Germain Codex," 60–61.

40 Outtier, "Les *Prosermeneiai* du Codex Bezae," 76; Outtier, "Réponses oraculaires," 182.

41 The first is prefaced with the term *t'argmanut 'iwn*, i.e., 'interpretation' (*hermēneia*).

42 Erich Renhart, *Ein spätantikes Los-Buch. Die Handschrift 2058/2 der Universitätsbibliothek Graz – Ein armenisches Palimpsest* (Graz: Uni-Press, 2015), esp. 122; Outtier, "Réponses oraculaires," 182; Renhart "Eine armenische Palimpsesthandschrift an der Universitätsbibliothek Graz (UBG, ms. 2058/2)," in *Palimpsestes et éditions de textes: les textes littéraires. Actes du colloque à Louvain-la-Neuve (septembre 2003)*, ed. Véronique Somers (Louvain-la-Neuve: Université Catholique de Louvain Institut Orientaliste, 2009), 215–232.

desirable content. Clearly much more work is needed in order to understand the history and interrelationship of all this material.

It has been repeatedly remarked that the oracles, though called 'interpretations,' have no particular bearing on the biblical text.[43] I must disagree. It is clear that the oracles function as divinatory responses to specific inquiries, and that they derive, albeit indirectly and by means of significant alteration, from sources outside the gospel interpretive tradition. Nevertheless, while it is true that the oracles do not function as interpretations of the text in the sense that modern exegetes normally mean, there are surprising correspondences between the oracles and the biblical text. For example, at John 16:33, where Jesus encourages his disciples to "take heart, for [he has] overcome the world," oracle 246 also says, "in judgment you will be victorious" (ܒܕܝܢܐ ܬܬܒܛܠ ܐܢܬ). In fact, oracles regarding court decisions and judgments seem especially frequent in the scenes of Jesus' trials in John 18, and an oracle about laughter and ridicule is keyed to John 19:2, where the soldiers are taunting Jesus. Later in the same chapter, two oracles occur about deeds being completed well and finished, using the same Syriac term (ܥܠܡ) that occurs in the immediate gospel context more than once to speak of Jesus' completing and fulfilling his work on the cross (John 19:28, 30). The promise of finding what one seeks is keyed to the story of discovering the empty tomb, and an expectation of joy is expressed in the context of the resurrection narrative. It is true that in many instances there is no perceptible connection between the language of the oracle and that of its accompanying biblical text. Yet in some cases a theme or some terminology correlates with the biblical text in ways that must be intentional; they are ܦܫܩܢܐ, 'interpretations.'[44]

Understandably, William Wright missed the point of the oracular material when he catalogued BL Add MS 17119 in 1870. When Philip E. Pusey collated the manuscript for the 1901 edition of the Peshitta Gospels, no mention was made of this remarkable feature.[45] More recently, both Andreas Jückel's collations of the Syriac text, and the Vetus Latina transcriptions of Sangermanensis primus

43 E.g. M. Samuel Berger in *Bulletin Critique* 5 (1884) 361–66, as quoted by Harris, "The 'Sortes sanctorum' in the St. Germain Codex," 59. Harris reflected the same belief, which was also echoed by Metzger, "Manuscripts of John's Gospel with 'Hermeneiai,'" 166–67.

44 For further discussion of this point, see Childers, "Embedded Oracles: Sortilegium in a Syriac Gospel Codex," in *Contemporary Examinations of Classical Languages* (*Hebrew, Aramaic, and Syriac*)*: Valency, Lexicography, Grammar, and Manuscripts*, ed. Timothy M. Lewis et al., Perspectives on Linguistics and Ancient Languages 5 (Piscataway, NJ: Gorgias, 2016).

45 P. E. Pusey and G. H. Gwilliam, *Tetraeuangelium sanctum juxta simplicem Syrorum versionem ad fidem codicum, Massorae, editionem denuo recognitum* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901).

at least mark the locations of *hermēneiai*, but the oracles themselves are not of concern to the editors. This neglect is understandable, since these projects are specifically interested in the content of the biblical text. Yet the tendency has been to treat the text of Scripture as a separate quantity, to be identified and abstracted from its immediate context, ostensibly for the sake of recovering a pristine original form, or at least to understand better the history of the textual tradition. I do not fault this; but it is worth noting that the original scribe and users of the codex BL Add MS 17119 did not see it this way. They were not so disposed to detach the two elements, but went to considerable trouble and expense to ensure that the biblical text and the oracles were integrally linked. This is clearly seen in the example of the Syriac BL Add MS 17119, but is also evident in the aforementioned parallel Armenian, Latin, Greek, and Graeco-Coptic sources.[46] The Syriac codex is a reminder that the detached and abstract biblical text is something that has never actually existed as such, useful as the concept may be in certain types of academic work. For instance, when one uses the Pusey edition of the Peshitta, one may get a certain sense of our Syriac manuscript; but when a person looks at the codex itself, he or she is liable to be struck by a very different picture, one that discloses crucial features of the text's context and original significance that are effaced when the biblical text is isolated for extraction and put to other uses – erased, like a certain eighth-century Armenian gospel palimpsest.

Finally, these artifacts attest to a different hermeneutic than we typically see in patristic and medieval commentaries, yet a hermeneutic nonetheless, perhaps not officially sanctioned, but popular, and executed with some care by learned clergy.[47] They show us a different mode of interpretation by which to bring the divine authority of the text to bear on the believer's questions. In this hermeneutic, historical and literary context do not provide the primary matrices in which the interpreting priest or monk determines the significance of the text for a person's life; neither does dogmatic framing. Instead, it is the interpretation's material location in the authoritative artifact that gives it its power. Its connection to the biblical text is concrete, yet vague, perhaps only thematic or terminological, but mainly positional. And the method by which one coordinates a particular biblical location to the inquirer's concerns

46 For a detailed analysis of the formal characteristics of BL Add MS 17119 and its history, see Childers, "'You Will Find what You Seek': the Form and Function of a Sixth-Century Divinatory Bible in Syriac," In *Snapshots of Evolving Traditions: Jewish and Christian Manuscript Culture, Textual Fluidity, and New Philology*, ed. Liv Ingeborg Lied and Hugo Lundhaug, TUGAL 175 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017), 242–71.

47 In particular, monks and desert hermits came to fulfill the social function of the oracle; see Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 186–95, 257, 267–68.

proceeds according to different principles than those normally associated with exegesis, ancient or modern. Yet it is a hermeneutical act nonetheless, one that accords the text of Scripture great prestige, but accesses its authority in a distinct mode.

These materials remind us that even fairly common practices may leave surprisingly sparse traces in surviving artifacts. As we learn more about the history and interrelationships of these unusual materials, perhaps we will also come to understand better the diverse functions that biblical texts have had amongst those who held them sacred. Since the Syriac manuscript BL Add MS 17119 is the most complete and legible extant instance of this specific phenomenon known to exist,[48] it will play a major role in that study. Perhaps by devoting further attention to the study of this unique codex, its very last oracle, number 308, will turn out to be true for the researcher: "a good return will come to you in the end" (ܐܬܝܠܐ ܛܒܐ ܠܟ ܒܣܘܦ ܡܠܬܐ).

48 In personal correspondence with me, Andreas Jückel has confirmed that he and his colleagues have found no other Syriac codices of John with *hermēneiai* like BL Add. 17119 in the thirty or so Peshitta and fifteen Harklean-version manuscripts that they have collated in their ongoing work on the Syriac text of John.

CHAPTER 6

Secondhand Homer

Michael Meerson

Be gracious, O Muse Grammatica, save from starvation!
Remedy you have discovered: Μῆνιν ἄειδε, θεά.
– LUCIAN[1]

1 Lot Oracles in Antiquity

A fourth-century compendium of magical spells containing a Homeromanteion,[2] an oracle composed of quotations from the poems of Homer, was first published by Carl Wessely and Frederic Kenyon in 1893,[3] and then, forty years later, by Karl Preisendanz as PGM VII 1–148.[4] Two other papyri with fragments of this oracle were published since then by Orsolina Montevecchi (P.Bon. 3) and Peter Parsons (P.Oxy. LVI 3831). These fragments were analyzed in a re-edition of PGM VII by Franco Maltomini, who has arrived at the conclusion that all extant papyri with the Homeromanteion stem from one source.[5]

One of the fragments, the Oxyrhynchus papyrus, contains the instructions for inquiring of the oracle: First, the practitioners have to consult the list of days and hours on which the oracle may be used. In PGM VII this list precedes

1 Lucian, *Epigrammata*, no. 22, εἰς γραμματικούς (*Anth. Gr.* 3:23 no. 12).

2 This title is mentioned in Preisendanz's edition (PGM VII, line 216). It is probably a marginal note being too long to fit the line. Neither Kenyon (see below) nor Maltomini include this note into their publications.

3 In the same year but independently: Carl Wessely, *Neue griechische Zauberpapyri* (Wien: F. Tempsky, 1893); Frederic Kenyon, *Greek Papyri in the British Museum* 1, 83–115 (London: British Museum, 1893) = P.Lond. 121.

4 Karl Preisendanz, *Die griechischen Zauberpapyri* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1928; repr. with corrections and supplements by Albert Henrichs; Stuttgart: Teubner, 1973; repr. Munich: K.G. Saur, 2002); English trans: Hans D. Betz, *The Greek Magical Papyri in Translation, Including the Demotic Spells* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986; repr. 1992).

5 Franco Maltomini, "P.Lond. 121 (= PGM VII), 1–221: Homeromanteion," *ZPE* 106 (1995): 107–22.

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the oracle. Then, the practitioners must pray to Apollo, focusing at the same time on their question. After that, they take one die and cast it three times, thus obtaining a combination of three numbers, from one to six each. The oracle contains 216 such combinations, each linked to one full verse from Homeric poems that was supposed to answer the user's question.

At first glance, the Homeromanteion can easily be attributed to one of two major groups of the lot oracle, or *sortes*, as this sort of divination is also called.[6] To the first group belongs an oracle giving a positive or a negative answer to any question of the user. Usually this was a metric response with a sheer amount of allegory and uncertainty added to a simple 'yes' or 'no'; hence a wide spectrum of meanings could be applied to the practitioner's circumstances. The most ancient *sortes* belong in this category. Those who wished to consult the alphabet-oracle from Adada in Pisidia (*CIG* 43790, 3rd c. BCE) had to roll a four-sided knucklebone with number-letters of the Greek alphabet five times, and then to read a verse inscribed next to the obtained combination of letters on a pillar in the temple.[7] A divination device could also be less stationary; the Latin divinatory tablets, for example, contain an answer and not just a reference to a temple stone.[8] At first the practitioner had to visit a sacred place in order to consult these tablets, but eventually they were recorded in books of fortune, and their connection to a sacred place was disrupted. In compensation for this loss, books of fortune such as *Sortes sanctorum* and *Sortes apostolorum*[9] claimed a divine or prophetic origin and nature of their text as a reliable source of divination.

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6 From the Latin *sors*, 'a lot' or 'fate.' For a comprehensive bibliography on *sortes*, see Pieter W. van der Horst, *Sortes: het gebruik van heilige boeken als lotsorakels in de oudheid*, Mededelingen van de Afdeling Letterkunde. Nieuwe reeks 62:3 (Amsterdam: Koninklijke Nederlandse Akademie van Wetenschappen, 1999); Pieter W. van der Horst, "Sortes: Sacred Books as instant oracles in Late Antiquity." In *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. Leonard V. Rutgers et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 1999). For an analysis of the evolution of *sortes* from antiquity through modernity, see Michael Meerson, "Book is a Territory: A Hebrew Book of Fortune in Context," *JSQ* 13 (2006): 388–411.

7 For this and other alphabet/temple oracles in Asia Minor see Franz Heinvetter, *Würfel – und Buchstabenorakel in Griechenland und Kleinasien* (Breslau: Grass, Barth & Co., 1912). For a bibliography on Hellenistic oracles, see Fritz Graf, "Rolling the Dice for an Answer," in *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter T. Struck (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 51–98.

8 E.g., *CIL* I 2183, and *CIL* I 2173.

9 Edited in C. Chabaneau, "Les Sorts des *Apôtres*." *Revue des langues romanes*, 3rd ser. 4 (1880): 264–74. See also William E. Klingshirn, "Defining the Sortes Sanctorum: Gibbon, Du Cange, and Early Christian Lot Divination," *JECS* 10 (2002): 77–130, with a list of manuscripts on page 129. For the Coptic version, see *Papyrus Vatican Copt.* 1 (7th–8th c. CE) in A. van Lantschoot, "Une Collection Sahidique de 'Sortes Sanctorum,'" *Mus* 69 (1956): 35–52.

Needless to say, such 'light-construction' oracles offered to their authors a greater flexibility and volume than stone pillars. Thanks to this flexibility, the second class of *sortes* emerged. Its hallmark was a list of specific questions attached to the oracle which was structured in such a way that a user could select any question from the list and then be directed to a precise answer concerning the subject matter. The Sortes Astrampsychi, with ninety-two questions,[10] and the Sortes Sangallenses, subdivided into 137 categories,[11] are the only oracle of this kind that survived from antiquity. Other books of fortune with specific questions are late-antique or medieval; among them are the Latin Sortes Duodecim Patriarcharum,[12] Experimentarius Bernardini Silvestris,[13] and the Hebrew Geniza Goralot.[14]

10 Recently re-edited and analyzed by Franziska Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi. Problemlösungsstrategien durch Orakel im römischen Ägypten*, Orientalische Religionen in der Antike 3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010). See also previous editions: Rudolph Hercher, *Astrampsychi oraculorum decades CIII* (Berlin, 1863); Gerald M. Browne, "The Composition of the Sortes Astrampsychi," *Bulletin of the London University Institute of Classical Studies* 17 (1970): 95–100; Browne, *The Papyri of the Sortes Astrampsychi*, Beiträge zur klassischen Philologie 58 (Meisenheim am Glan: A. Hain, 1974) = P.Oxy. XII 1477, XXXVIII 2832, 2833; Browne, "The Origin and Date of the Sortes Astrampsychi," *Illinois Classical Studies* 1 (1976): 53–58; Browne, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. 1 (Leipzig: Teubner, 1983); Randall Stewart, "The Textual Transmission of the Sortes Astrampsychi," *Illinois Classical Studies* 20 (1995): 134–147; Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. 2 (Leipzig: Teubner, 2001); P.Oxy. LXVII 4581.

11 Alban Dold and Richard Meister, eds., *Die Orakelsprüche im St. Galler Palimpsestcodex 908* (*die sogenannten Sortes Sangallenses*) *auf Grund neuer Lesung und mit erweitertem Text nach Materien geordnet* (Wien: Rohrer, 1948). See also Alexander Demandt, "Die Sortes Sangallenses. Eine Quelle zur spätantiken Sozialgeschichte," in *Atti dell'Accademia romanistica costantiniana. 8 convegno internazionale*, ed. G. Crifò and Stefano Giglio (Naples: Edizioni scientifiche italiane, 1991), 635–50; Karl Strobel, "Soziale Wirklichkeit und irrationales Weltverstehen in der Kaiserzeit. Sortes Astrampsychi und Sortes Sangallenses," *Laverna* 3 (1992): 129–141; Kai Brodersen, "Die Sortes Sangallenses: Ein antikes Losorakel," in *Alte Texte – neue Wege*, ed. Richard Kussl, Dialog Schule und Wissenschaft, Klassische Sprachen und Literaturen 38 (Munich: Bayerischer Schulbuch Verlag, 2004), 129–54; William E. Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul: The *Sortes Sangallenses*," in Johnston and Struck, *Mantikê*, 99–128.

12 Edited by André Boutemy, "Recueil poetique du manuscript Cotton Vitellius A XII," *Latomus* 1 (1937): 290–313. See also Theodore C. Skeat, "An Early Medieval 'Book of Fate': the Sortes XII Patriarcharum," *MRSt(L)* 3 (1954): 41–54.

13 Edited by Mirella B. Savorelli, "Un Manuale di Geomanzia presentato da Bernardo Silvestre da Tours (XII secolo): l'Experimentarius," *RCSF* 14 (1959): 283–342. See also Ch. Burnett, "What is the Experimentarius of Bernardus Silvestris? A Preliminary Survey of the Material," *AHDL* 44 (1977): 79–125.

14 *Camb. T.-S. K* 21.78 (10th c. CE), *T.-S. K* 12.37 (11th c. CE), *T.-S. K* 1.79 (11th c. CE), *JTSL ENA* 2938.2 (10th c. CE), *JTSL ENA* 3072.3 (13th c. CE), forthcoming in Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked. *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, vol. 4. Tübingen.

Whereas the *sortes* of the first category were believed to derive the binding force of their predictions from an outside source of magical power, such as a sacred place or a person that generated the text of the oracle, the lot oracles of the second category themselves became prophecy-generators with inherent magical potency, mysteriously giving a precise answer to a specific question. In order to augment the authority of such *sortes*, their creation was frequently attributed to famous magicians and philosophers such as Astrampsychos and Bernardus Silvestris.

The Homeromanteion apparently fits in the first category of the lot oracle. The user can ask any question, while the answers are vague enough to suit it. A closer look, however, reveals a peculiarity that can seriously disappoint the practitioner: some answers are too uncertain, giving no reason to consider them as either positive or negative. Lot 3–3–3, for example, could make a good riddle, but hardly an answer of any kind: "Plants her head in heaven and walks upon the earth." A not-too-well-read recipient of such a prophecy can only guess who she is![15] Equally disappointing is the mysterious innuendo in lot 5–3–6: "Keep quiet, friend, and do as I say." Verse 4–3–6 seems encouraging: "And you would gain every Trojan's thanks and praise." But is it really good? And what on earth is gender-oriented lot 1–3–6 supposed to mean? "I also care about all these things, woman, but very terribly."

At the same time, the majority of answers seem too specific. In fact, once we know the standard set of questions in the *sortes* of the second category, it is easy to see that the Homeromanteion was composed with these very questions in mind. For example:[16]

1.1 ***Enmity and Friendship***

115.4–2–1: Come now, let us make these concessions to one another (*Il.* 4.62).

175.5–6–1: Where are you two rushing? What causes the heart within your breast to rage (*Il.* 8.413)?

143.4–6–5: Had cast aside wrath and chosen friendship (*Il.* 16.282).

1.2 ***Journey and Safe Return***

26.1–5–2: Within this very year, Odysseus will arrive here (*Od.* 14.161; 19.306).

123.4–3–3: Surely then the journey will not be useless or fail to occur (*Od.* 2.273).

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15 The proverbial description of Eris (Strife); cf. Galen, *De methodo medendi*, 10.7.9; Aelius Aristides, *Περὶ ὁμονοίας ταῖς πόλεσιν*, 532.13; Heraclitus, *All.* 29.4.5; Dio Chrysostom, *Dei cogn.* (*Or. 12*) 72.5.

16 Trans. Hebert Martin in Betz, *Greek Magical Papyri*.

195.6–3–3: The man is nearby. Our search will not be long, if you are willing (*Il.* 14.110).

1.3 *Prospects of Marriage*

86.3–3–2: Would that such a man be called my husband (*Od.* 6.244).
150.5–1–6: So there's nothing else as horrible and vile as a woman (*Od.* 11.427).
158.5–3–2: Never to have gone to bed with her and had intercourse (*Il.* 9.133).

1.4 *Sickness and Cure*

55.2–4–1: So he spoke, and ordered Paion to administer a cure (*Il.* 5.899).
95.3–4–5: As there is no one who could keep the dogs off your head (*Il.* 22.348).
200.6–4–2: Take heart, and let your thoughts not be of death (*Il.* 10. 383).

It seems that a question concerning one's illness could hardly be answered by a verse taken from the journey-rubric. How, then, could the Homer-oracle direct the inquirer to the specific answer? And if it could not, how did it compensate for this apparent malfunction? Perhaps a quotation from Homer offered the interpreter something else in addition to a single verse in the chosen lot. To begin with, how and why were these particular verses selected from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*?[17]

2 Homeromanteion According to Homer

Homeric quotations in magical texts have been thoroughly discussed.[18] The mechanism of quoting and its rationale is explained by the historiola theory: The magician simultaneously addresses a current problem and refers to the well-known solution found for the problem's archetype in the mythical past.[19] The link between the past and the present situations is usually obvious, as

17 The same question was addressed also by Andromache Karanika, "Homer the Prophet: Homeric Verses and Divination in the Homeromanteion," in *Sacred Words: Orality, Literacy and Religion*, ed. André Lardinois et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 255–78. The author "investigate(s) the complex relation between orality and literature." Many of Karanika's observations were also made by the present author. This paper will check and specify some of them, as well as proceed with a more profound assessment of their significance.

18 Richard Heim, *Incantamenta magica graeca latina* (Leipzig: Teubner, 1892), 514–20; Derek Collins, "The Magic of Homeric Verses," *CP* 3 (2008): 211–36.

19 David Frankfurter, "Narrating Power: The Theory and Practice of the Magical *Historiola* in Ritual Spells," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 457–76.

in a spell for curing the pain in breast and uterus, PGM XIIa.9–10 (*Il.* 2.548): "The daughter of Zeus nourished, and the fruitful land bore." As Erechteus was born by the land and nourished by Athena, so a prospective child of the sick woman shall be born and nourished too. In some spells, however, the choice of a specific quotation from Homer has no explanation unless its original context in the poems is taken into consideration. In PGM XIIa.2–9, a "bloody flux" is to be healed by an amulet quoting *Il.* 1.75, "the wrath of Apollo, far-darting lord." An apparent curse actually paves the way for recovery, because the verse is taken from the speech of Kalchas, who reveals the reason of that very "bloody flux" plaguing the camp of the Achaeans and also explains how to cure it.

In the same way, the meaning of prophecies expressed with the words of Homer could be explained, enriched with nuances, and even reversed if considered in their original context. For example, lot 3–2–5 (*Il.* 22.50) promises "We will ransom with bronze and gold, for we have it in the house." This apparently favorable prediction is not about riches and a successful enterprise. Like another verse from Book 22 (lot 2–3–5), "And his mother for her part continued the lament amid a flood of tears," it describes the failed attempt of Priam and Hecuba to dissuade Hector from engaging in battle with Achilles, and it is Hector's body which will eventually be ransomed with gold.[20] The diviner could interpret it as advice to refrain from something which the inquirer desired to pursue. *Iliad* 22.185 (lot 3–4–2), detached from its context, seems unreservedly positive too: "Act in whatever way your mind is moved, and no longer hold back!" Yet this may be false encouragement, since these were the words of Zeus to Athena when he finally gave up on Hector and removed his protection. Line 268 of the same book (lot 3–1–2) also sets an entrapment for a naïve user of the Homeromanteion: "Remember battle skill, today you badly need it!" says Achilles to Hector, just to be sure, as Eustathius of Thessalonica explains, that Hector would not run and would not steal the victory of Achilles.[21]

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20 *Il.* 22.50 points to the "pitiful ignorance" of Priam, as the exegetic scholia says. See Nicholas Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 6: *Books 21–24* (Cambridge: University Press, 1993), 111.

21 Eustathius, *ad Iliadem* 4.614.3 ff., 616.17. In fact, such reversal of an oracle's apparent meaning was a well-known technique of ancient diviners. Cicero recounts a story in which a runner, preparing for the Olympics, dreamt that he was riding a swift chariot spanned with four horses. Whereas one diviner immediately predicted a victory for him, the sophist Antiphon objected: "Of course you will lose, for it is clear that four horses will run ahead of you." Cicero, *Div.* 2.144 = Antiphon 87 B 80 D-K = fr. 80.

An acquaintance with a broader context of the *Iliad* seems also useful for the interpreter of the Homeromanteion. Book 22, line 348 (lot 3–4–5) brings a bad omen: "As there is no one who could keep the dogs off your head." Yet not as bad as it seems, since in Book 23 Apollo did keep dogs off Hector's head, surrounding his body with indestructible mist. Verses 22.512–513 could leave the user unsatisfied because of the incomprehensive meaning of their advice: "All this I will throw into fire" (1–4–3), and "You made them useless, you will not be lying in them" (1–6–4). It is important, therefore, to remember that these verses belong to the lament of Andromache, that she is talking here about the clothing of Hector, complaining of not being able even to burn his clothing together with his body at a proper funeral. She is therefore burning Hector's possessions, and is clearly making a mistake because his body will eventually return home.

It follows from the observations above that the quotations for the Homeromanteion might be selected by its author in consideration of their original context. It can also be taken for granted that the Homeromanteion derived from oral tradition, since no diviner responsible for the oracle's composition was likely to possess the entire corpus of Homeric epos,[22] and even less likely to scroll through multiple papyrus-rolls with some 30,000 lines in order to find a suitable verse.[23] We may also suggest that the most dramatic parts of the Homeric poems were more likely to be learned by heart, and therefore were better represented in the Homeromanteion than the other parts with less intense texture. Indeed, the selection of quotations is far from even: almost all verses were taken from the speeches of the poems' characters, which naturally were easier to remember,[24] while the quotations from the much more popular *Iliad* are almost twice as many as those from the *Odyssey*.[25] The duels were one of the preferences: two heroes, before they engage in a melee combat, may address each other, or may be provoked or encouraged by their friends or gods. This exchange produced as many as twenty quotations from books four and five. The ultimate preferences, however, proved to be the culmination chapters of the epic, such as the delegation of Odyssey and Ajax

22 Cf. Xenophon, *Mem.* 4.2.10; Plutarch, *Alc.* 7.1.

23 A well-educated person was supposed to know large portions of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, if not the entire poems, by heart. Thus Xenophon (*Symp.* 3.5) claims the knowledge of all of Homer's poetry as part of his education.

24 That is, about ninety percent of all verses in the Homeromanteion; compare to the different proportion of objective narrative and direct speech in *Iliad*: the latter takes up slightly less than a half of the poem. Geoffrey S. Kirk, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, vol. 2: *Books 5–8* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 28.

25 Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, 6:40.

to Achilles at the moment when Trojan army breached the wall and threatened to burn the Achaean ships (twelve verses from Book 9), and the death of Hector in Book 22, providing the maximum number of quotations – thirteen verses. The same analysis of the *Odyssey* displays an even clearer picture and supports the above observation. Whereas only four verses, at average, were quoted from any single book of the poem, as many as twenty-two verses were taken from Book 21, where an old beggar finally becomes the king Odysseus, strings his bow, and shoots the first arrow.

This may look convincing to the modern reader. Indeed, Book 22 of the *Iliad* is the climax of the epos,[26] and Book 21 of the *Odyssey* is a natural choice, as it seems, for the Cambridge Reading Greek course.[27] Yet preferences of the ancient readers of Homer seem to differ from ours. The following part of this chapter will test the hypothesis of the contextual derivation of Homeric verses, and will substantially reshape it.

The *Iliad* has survived in about 2,000 manuscripts, 1,500 of which are papyri dated from the fourth century BCE to the eight century CE.[28] In 1954, Victor Martin drew scholars' attention to his discovery of the independent transmission of the separate books of the *Iliad*.[29] A few years later, this was confirmed by John A. Davison who presented a comprehensive picture showing how many copies of each book from the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* survived.[30] His research also demonstrated the occurrences of the books by centuries, from the first to the third century CE. The maximum number of occurrences was recorded for the first two books: thirty-five occurrences for each. The numbers then decrease: twenty-four for Book 5, thirteen for Book 6 and Book 8, and ten for Books 9, 11, and 13. The second part of the *Iliad* left substantially fewer textual witnesses: only five in average for each book, and only seven for Book 22. For the *Odyssey*, the occurrences of books also contradict the proportion of quotes selected for the Homeromanteion. Of eighty-three occurrences, as many as ten papyri contain Book 4, and only two contain Book 21.[31]

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26 Many modern authors refer to Book 22 of the Iliad in these or similar words; see, e.g., Richardson, *The Iliad: A Commentary*, 6:105.

27 *The Triumph of Odysseus*, ed. The Joint Association of Classical Teachers' Greek Course (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996).

28 Graeme D. Bird, *Multitextuality in Homeric Iliad: The Witness of the Ptolemaic Papyri* (Washington, D.C.: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2010), 1.

29 Victor Martin, *Papyrus Bodmer I: Iliade* (Cologny-Genève: Bibliothèque Bodmer, 1954).

30 John A. Davison, "The Study of Homer in Graeco-Roman Egypt," in *Akten des VIII. internationalischen Kongresses für Papyrologie in Wien*, ed. Hans Gerstinger (Vienna: Österreichische Staatsdruckerei, 1955), 51–58.

31 Davison, "Study of Homer," 57.

If the survey of textual witnesses for the poems of Homer accurately testifies to the popularity of the poems' separate books, then the above hypothesis regarding the context-based selection of quotes for the Homeromanteion is wrong. But maybe the bare fact of finding the book does not testify to the book's popularity. Most of the papyri containing Books 1 and 2 are school exercises, which only prove their customary use for studying Greek language and literature. Teachers might want their students to learn the catalogue of ships by heart,[32] while the students, given a choice, might nevertheless find this catalogue too boring to keep a copy.[33] Reuse of the separate books of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* as a toilet paper,[34] or for writing an account or a petition[35] on its other side, was hardly a proof of those books' popularity. Like the gospels, most of the surviving papyri of the *Iliad* were found in the trash heaps of Oxyrhynchus. Therefore, the question addressed by AnneMarie Luijendijk about the pattern of the gospels' preservation is relevant for the *Iliad* as well: Why did the people choose to trash something that they were supposed to cherish?[36] Perhaps, they purchased a new, better copy of a 'dog-eared' book, or the books were thrown away simply because their owners disliked them. The logic goes in both directions. Choosing the right one involves another analysis.

The Homeromanteion is a cento-like composition[37] built up entirely of Homeric verses, but in contrast to real centos, it is devoid of any original meaning or correspondence between these verses. Only a few real centos from antiquity have survived: three short compositions in the Palatine Anthology,[38] a ten-verse cento in a work of Irenaeus,[39] a short second-century graffito inscribed on a leg of a statue of Memnon,[40] and a cento of 1,915 lines describing

32 Eustathius (*ad Iliadem*, 263.33), referring to Porphyry, reports that legal codes of some cities required the school-children to learn the catalogue of ships by heart.

33 A third-century papyrus with Book 2 of the *Iliad* as well some medieval manuscripts omits the catalogue of ships. See Michael Haslam, "Homeric Papyri and Transmission of the Text," in *A New Companion to Homer*, ed. Ian Morris and Barry B. Powell, Mnemosine Supplement 163 (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 55–100, at 59.

34 *Il.* 2.277–318 with scholia minora in P.Oxy. LXVII 4633.

35 E.g. *Il.* 5 in P.Oxy. II 223v (on the verso of a petition); *Od.* 1.289–312 in P.Duk. inv. 768r.

36 AnneMarie Luijendijk, "Sacred Scriptures as Trash: Biblical Papyri from Oxyrhynchus," *VC* 64 (2010) 217–54.

37 A literary composition entirely made up of selections from one or more compositions.

38 9.361, 381, 382: See Herbert Hunger, *Der hochsprachliche profane Literatur der Byzantiner*, vol. 2 (Munich: Beck, 1978); Mark D. Usher, "Prolegomenon to the Homeric Centos," *AJP* 118 (1997): 305–21.

39 Robert L. Wilken, "The Homeric Cento in Irenaeus, Adversus Haereses I, 9, 4," *VC* 21 (1967): 25–33.

40 Ewen L. Bowie, "Greek Poetry in the Antonine Age," in *Antonine Literature*, ed. D. A. Russel (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 53–90, at 65.

the passions of Christ. The last was originally a shorter composition written in the fourth century by bishop Patricius and expanded to its current state a half-century later by Empress Eudocia Augusta. A brief look at the index in the cento's latest edition[41] suffices to show an astonishing similarity between the proportions of numbers: a number of verses selected from the separate books of the Homeric poems for Eudocia's cento seems to match the number of the extant papyri containing these books.

A calculation confirms the impression. The first and second books of the *Iliad* were quoted most often – 184 times. Book 5 was also popular, although to a lesser degree: Eudocia derived seventy-two verses from it. Towards the middle of the *Iliad*, Eudocia's interest and perhaps knowledge started to fade, resulting in only 126 verses taken from Books 12–15 (18+46+32+30). A very similar picture emerges from West's edition of the *Iliad* referring to only eighty extant papyri for Books 12–15 (17+11+24+28) and 249 papyri for the first four books (101+70+43+35).[42] Eudocia's preference for specific books of the *Odyssey* shows an even greater degree of correspondence with the number of their textual witnesses: whereas only twenty-nine verses were chosen from Book 21 (fifteen verses from a book being an average), as many as 120 verses were selected from the mysteriously popular Book 4!

It may now be concluded that the number of the surviving papyri with Homeric poems indeed reflects the popularity of their separate books. This popularity was a primary factor for Eudocia's selection (naturally matching her own preference), but not for the selection by the author of the Homeromanteion. Consequently, the link between the Homeromanteion and the poems of Homer is not as proximate as has been assumed. Besides or even instead of the factor of popularity and intensity of scenes from which verses were selected for the Homeromanteion, there was another factor that directed its composition. But what could it be?

3 Homeromanteion beyond Homer

Separate books or passages of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* also circulated in works of grammarians, whose explanations were sometimes recorded in margins of the Homeric poems and sometimes transmitted separately. Copies of separate grammatical commentaries were few, and they hardly enjoyed the

41 Rocco Schembra, ed., *Homerocentones*, CCSG 62 (Turnhout: Brepols, 2007), 447 ff.
42 Martin L. West, ed., *Homeri Ilias* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1998).

full respect due to a work of literature.[43] This cannot be said about exegetical commentaries on Homer. The *Cave of Nymphs* by Porphyry, commenting on only ten lines of Book 13 of the *Odyssey*, is a famous example of the exegetical allegory of Homer: two openings of the cave were interpreted as the entrance to and the exit from this world, the bees as souls, and the olive tree of Athena as wisdom that governs the earth.[44] In a similar vein, other authors expounded the shields of Agamemnon and Achilles as representations of cosmic powers,[45] and the theomachy in Books 21–22 as a struggle of Achilles with his own psyche,[46] to name only a few among the countless allegories discovered in the *Iliad*.[47] Interpretation in terms of parable, in practice limited only by the interpreter's imagination, was considered vital for a proper understanding of the Homeric poems.

Of course exegetes were not the only ones who quoted Homer. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* were arguably the most popular source of citations in books on any topic: Plato alone quotes Homer some 150 times.[48] As a result, the verses of Homer quoted by authors in order to support their own ideas accumulated new meanings. Then, with quotations that became proverbial, the post-textual oral tradition of Homer began. For an educated seer in possession of the Homeromanteion, this tradition offered countless strata of interpretations, from a simple meaning of the isolated verse to a snowball of acquired contexts. In the following part of the chapter, I try to demonstrate the actual potential of the Homeromanteion. A sample group, as before, will consist of quotations from Book 22 of the *Iliad*.

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43 Davison ("The Study of Homer," 55) quotes a papyrus (*P.R.U.M.* I 19) containing a publisher's note that may provide evidence for the separate publication of commentaries on Homer. Davison also argues against popularity of such commentaries: Had they been popular, the books of the famous grammarian Aristarchus would hardly have disappeared without a trace.

44 Porphyry, *The Cave of the Nymphs in the Odyssey*, ed. and trans. Seminar Classics 609 (Buffalo: State University of New York, 1969).

45 By Crates of Mallos, *apud* Eustathius, *ad Iliadem*, 4.220.9 ff. See Philip R. Hardie, *Virgil's Aeneid: Cosmos and Imperium* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1986), 341–42; Gregory Nagy, *Homer the Preclassic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 356–60.

46 Theagenes of Rhegium, A2 D-K 8.2, in Giuliana Lanata, ed., *Poetica pre-Platonica: testimonianze e frammenti* (Florence: La nuova Italia, 1963).

47 On the allegoric exegesis by Heraclitus and in Greek literature in general, see Heraclitus, *Homeric Problems*, ed. and trans. Donald A. Russell and David Konstan (Leiden: Brill, 2005), xiii–xxvii. See also Peter Struck, *Birth of the Symbol: Ancient Readers at the Limits of their Texts* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004); Dirk Obbink, "Early Greek Allegory," in *The Cambridge Companion to Allegory*, ed. Rita Copeland and Peter T. Struck (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 15–25.

48 George Edwin Howes, "Homeric Quotations in Plato and Aristotle," *HSCP* 6 (1895): 153–201.

In line 13 (lot 3–4–6),[49] Achilles threatens to kill Apollo, but Apollo escapes him, saying, οὐ μέν με κτενέεις, ἐπεὶ οὔ τοι μόρσιμός εἰμι, "you will not kill me, since I am not subject to fate." For Protagoras, the very fact that Achilles was able to engage in battle, first, the river Scamander, and then Apollo himself, signifies a sudden increase in Achilles's might and importance.[50] Yet Plato probably refers to this episode as an example of Achilles's arrogance and a complete lack of moral virtues.[51]

This particular verse was quoted in a variety of contexts. Theodorus Prodromus, in a poetic commentary on 1 Sam 14–31 addresses these words to Saul, proclaiming his inability to kill David (*1 Reg.* 130b.4): Τίπτε, Σαοὺλ… Δαβὶδ ἀποκτενέειν μεμαώς, τὸν ὁμόζυγα Μελχόλ; οὔ μιν ἀποκτενέεις, ἐπεὶ οὔ τοι μόρσιμός ἐστιν, "Why, Saul, are you so eager to kill David, the spouse of Michal? You will not kill him, he is not subject to fate!" Geogorius Cedrenus put them in the mouth of Apollonius of Tyana. In Rome, the astrologer Largios predicted Domitian's day of death, who in turn ordered the arrest of both Largios and Apollonius:

> At that moment, they say, Apollonius said *that proverbial phrase*, "you will not kill me, etc." (τότε φασὶ καὶ τὸ πολυθρύλητον ἔπος ἐκεῖνο τὸν Ἀπολλώνιον εἰπεῖν) and disappeared. He was then seen in Puteoli, at a three-day distance from Rome.[52]

A similar story was told in the Astrologica. Domitian sought to imprison the magician Proclus for the same offence, namely the prediction of the emperor's death. Proclus uttered the Homeric verse as if it were a charm, but instead of disappearing, he killed the emperor.[53] Be it a magical spell or not, this verse clearly was the proverbial phrase, τὸ πολυθρύλητον ἔπος, as Georgius himself put it.

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49 Always indicating the verse in Book 22 of the *Iliad* and the three-number combination in the Homeromanteion.

50 D-K 80 A30. See also the scholia to *Il.* 21.240 in Hartmut Erbse, *Scholia graeca in Homeri Iliadem* (*scholia vetera*) (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1969–1988), 101; and Andrea Capra, "Notes and Discussions: Protagoras' Achilles: Homeric Allusion as a Satirical Weapon (Pl. *Prt.* 340a)," *CP* 100 (2005): 274–77.

51 Plato, *Resp.* 391c. On references to Achilles in Plato's Republic, see Angela Hobbs, *Plato and the Hero: Courage, Manliness and the Impersonal Good* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 199 ff.

52 Geogorius Cedrenus, *Compendium*, 1.431.5.

53 *Testimonia de astrologis Romanis* (excerpta e cod. Paris. suppl. gr. 607 A, fol. 43), ed. F. Cumont, *Catalogus Codicum Astrologorum Graecorum* 8.4 (Paris: Lamertin, 1921).

The deceptive encouragement of line 185 (lot 3–4–2) becomes more transparent in the context of analogous situations: In Book 4, Zeus proposes a peaceful solution to the Trojan war, Athena and Hera then protest and Zeus immediately surrenders using the same words he does to give up on Hector in Book 22: "Act however you wish, and don't hesitate." This is bad enough, but a possible interpretation may be further downgraded from thoroughly masked deceit to blatant mockery. For example, Eudocia Augusta in her homerocentones incorporates this verse into a passage describing the crucifixion of Jesus:

> ὣδε δέ τις εἴπεσκε νέων ὑπερηνορεόντων (*Od.* 2.324)
> "εἰ μὲν δὴ θεός ἐσσι, θεοῖό τε ἔκλυες αὐδήν (*Od.* 4.831)
> καί πού τις δοκέεις μέγας ἔμμεναι ἠδὲ κραταιός, (*Od.* 18.382)
> *ἔρξον ὅπῃ δή τοι νόος ἔπλετο, μηδ' ἔτ' ἐρώει.* (*Il.* 22.185)
> ἀλλὰ τά γ' οὐ κατὰ κόσμον ὀΐομαι, οὐδέ με πείσεις (*Od.* 14.363)
> ὦ ξεῖν'· οὕτω γάρ νύ τοι εὐκλείη τ' ἀρετή τε." (*Od.* 14.402).
>
> One of the overweening youths was saying this: (*Od.* 2.324)
> "If you indeed are a deity, and hear the divine voice, (*Od.* 4.831)
> and think that you are great and mighty, (*Od.* 18.382)
> *act however you wish, and don't hesitate.* (*Il.* 22.185)
> Yet one thing is wrong, in truth you cannot persuade me, (*Od.* 14.363)
> my friend, otherwise you would have had a great name and reputation."
> (*Od.* 14.402)

On a more positive note, line 219 (lot 3–2–4) is misleading in its apparent intimidation: οὔ οἱ νῦν ἔτι γ' ἔστι πεφυγμένον ἄμμε γενέσθαι, "now is it no longer possible for him to find escape from us." In fact it contains a favorable prediction and "projects a good hope" (προβολή ἀγαθῆς ἐλπίδος) according to the commentary of Eustathius.[54]

Line 263 (lot 4–1–6) falls in a category of Homeric similes, which have enjoyed continuous popularity from antiquity to modern times. They could be frequently discussed and quoted in any context, thus absorbing and projecting a limitless number of associations. In the *Iliad* Achilles is the most frequent user of similes;[55] line 263 is one of them: οὐδὲ λύκοι τε καὶ ἄρνες ὁμόφρονα θυμὸν ἔχουσιν, "nor lambs with wolves possess according souls." With these words,

54 Eustathius, *ad Iliadem*, 4.608.15–21.

55 Caroll Moulton, *Similes in the Homeric Poems* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1977), 100.

Achilles denies Hector's request for proper burial, which could simply signify to the user of the Homeromanteion that "your wish will not be granted." But there is more than this: in light of Euripides' scholia, this simile is fitting for the world of animals rather than the world of humans ruled by justice.[56] And indeed, in other chapters of the *Iliad*, the comparison with omnivorous (ὠμοφάγοι) wolves and lions is used to express the havoc of war and indiscriminate murder of both Achaeans and Trojans.[57] The meaning of the oracle may therefore be modified: "So-and-so openly commits injustice, but does not realize it yet."

Like many Homeric similes, this verse became a proverbial saying. It implied love affairs (ἡ παροιμία ἐπὶ τῶν ἐρωτικῶς ἐχόντων)[58] and also brought about another proverbial saying (ἐντεῦθεν ἡ παροιμία) referring to the unequal relationship of mature 'predators' and young 'lambs' – ἄρνα φιλοῦσι λύκοι, νέον ὡς φιλέουσιν ἐρασταί, "wolves love lambs, as lovers love youngsters."[59] In a similar vein, Maximus of Tyre quotes this proverbial verse to address the origin of enmity, saying that material possessions and physical beauty cause injustice in life, as if people were wolves and lambs.[60] The philosopher Atticus hints at another reason for people living in discord: different worldviews and scholarly concepts. As "men with lions form no faithful leagues, nor lambs with wolves possess according souls," so between followers of Plato and followers of Aristotle there is no friendship in regard to the doctrine of happiness.[61]

Indeed, proverbial similes might direct a seer to a number of interpretations only remotely connected with the meaning of a simile in the *Iliad*. Moreover, the use of similes had the potential to abandon this original meaning completely. Line 495 (5–3–3), for example, is another simile bearing an unfavorable prediction, according to its original context. The phrase χείλεα μέν τ' ἐδίην', ὑπερῴην δ' οὐκ ἐδίηνε, "and moistens the lips, but fails to moisten the palate," belongs to the lament of Andromache and describes the misery awaiting her son Astianax in the future. Surprisingly, Maximus finds this "failure to moisten the palate" suitable for illustrating an opposing idea – one's choice of a happier life. Just as "it moistens the lips, but fails to moisten the palate," he says, a small piece of trouble may make us stronger, but a full portion of disaster should be better avoided.[62]

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56 Scholia in Euripidem, 938. Cf. Hesiod, *Op.* 276–80, describing the lack of justice among the animals.

57 *Il.* 15.592, 16.157.

58 Scholia in Platonem (Phdr.), 241d.

59 Scholia vetera in Iliadem, ad loc.

60 Maximus of Tyre, *Dialexeis*, 35.6b.2 (On Friendship).

61 Atticus, *Fragmenta*, 4.21.2 (On Happiness, quoted in Eusebius, *Praep. ev.* 15.4.21.2).

62 Maximus of Tyre, *Dialexeis*, 34.5a.10.

These examples certainly do not exhaust all sources quoting and commenting on the verses from the Book 22 of the *Iliad* that were selected by the author of the Homeromanteion; but they suffice to demonstrate how an oracle, which may seem dysfunctional at first glance, may conceal an incredibly rich apparatus of various interpretations created by continuous study and exegesis. In proper hands, the Homeromanteion could be more flexible and at the same time more specific than any other oracle from the two categories described in the beginning of this chapter: The inquirer could ask any question, and could be given a precise answer by a seer who knew his Homer. In other words, the Homeromanteion combined the benefits of oracles that allowed any question but gave oblique answers with those of oracles that gave precise answers to a set list of questions.

At the same time, not everyone equipped with a Homeromanteion could be a successful diviner offering his clients a compelling prophecy. It is likely that the Homer-oracle was a work composed by a grammarian and exegete, and was designed for someone like Aristarchus, the most famous of Homeric scholiasts, who was called 'a prophet' by the Rhodian philosopher Panaetius, "because (he) could so easily divine the meaning of (Homeric) poems."[63]

4 Conclusion

The above observations lead to a conclusion with twofold significance. First, they enrich our knowledge of divinatory practice in antiquity. Books of fate such as the Sortes Astrampsychi, with explicit answers to specific questions, represent the latest stage of the oracle's evolution when every literate person could be his or her own seer. The starting point of this evolution was the shrine-oracle. Its divine origin was commonly recognized, but its prophecies were notoriously obscure.[64] Shrine-oracles were bound to specific locations and could be delivered only through authorized personnel. All these limitations had an obvious purpose: the placement of a real decision into the hands of persons charged with corresponding authority. The priests dealt the cards, but it was the government that made the game.[65]

63 Athenaeus, *Deipn*. 14.634cd.

64 Joseph Fontenrose, *Delphic Oracle: Its Responses and Operations; with a Catalogue of Responses* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978).

65 Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008), 55–56, discusses this distribution of power and responsibility, referring to a famous story from Herodotus, *Hist.* 7.140–141: Apollo orders Athenian to defend themselves by surrounding their city with wooden walls, but it was Themistocles who decided to build ships.

Private matters, of course, did not require an authoritative interpretation; yet it could be desirable. A banal phrase might have different meanings; hence, for example, a scholarly disagreement about the divinatory tablet *CIL* I^2.2183, *Laetus lubens petito quod dabitur gaudebis semper*. Eric Warmington translates it as "Seek you joyfully and willingly, you will be glad forever, because of what you have been given,"[66] which would mean for the inquirers that they are fortunate since their wish is already fulfilled. Cristiano Grottanelli, however, discerns irony in the tablet's advice, "Happily and spontaneously, ask for what you shall be given: you shall be happy forever."[67] In the other words, ask for what is rightfully yours, and only in this case shall you have it. If the inquirers had the same deliberations as we do, who might help them if not an educated seer capable of linguistic speculations not unlike those of Warmington and Grottanelli?

The multilayered text of Homer went many steps ahead of such divinatory tablets and temple oracles but did not sever a connection with them. On the one hand, the Homeromanteion was loaded with allusions and became mobile, yet it was not a self-sufficient oracle such as the Sortes Astrampsychi. Everyone could have a 'Homeric' prophecy, but not everyone could understand its intertextuality and connect an isolated verse to the question. Bare literacy was clearly not enough.

The second implication of the current study pertains to the oral tradition of Homer. Both homerocentones and the Homeromanteion derive from oral tradition, yet exhibit different patterns of derivation. Whereas homerocentones were assembled from the verses which Eudocia Augusta learned directly from the poems of Homer, probably as her school exercises, the Homeromanteion derived from the secondary use of Homer, quotations and scholia. Ὅμηρον ἐξ Ὁμήρου σαφηνίζειν – "Explaining Homer from Homer."[68] Of course, but not only!

66 Eric H. Warmington, *Remains of Old Latin*, vol. 4: *Archaic Inscriptions*, LCL (London: W. Heinemann, 1940), 246–48.

67 Cristiano Grottanelli, "Sorte unica pro casibus pluribus enotata: Literary Texts and Lot Inscriptions as Sources for Ancient Kleromancy," in Johnston and Struck, *Mantikê*, 129–46. Following the Italian translation by Carlo Carena, *Iscrizioni latine arcaiche* (Firenze: Sansoni, 1954), 28–29, 81–82.

68 Motto of Aristarchus, meaning that a commenter who is explaining questionable verses in Homer should use evidence from Homer.

CHAPTER 7

Sortes Biblicae Judaicae

Pieter W. van der Horst

The meaning and valuation of the Jewish Bible beyond its regular use in cultic, liturgical, and educational settings is nowhere better illustrated than in the Sefer Shimmush Tehillim, 'The Book of the Use of the Psalms.' The word 'use' in this title is a translation of the Hebrew *shimmush*, 'service,' but here in the meaning of 'taking into service for magical purposes.' This book was first published in 1551 in the Italian town of Sabbioneta and, with only slight modifications, is being reprinted – and used! – till the present day. We had to wait till the year 2010, however, before the first critical edition of this work appeared, or rather, before a synoptic edition of the most important manuscript evidence was published by the Berlin scholar Bill Rebiger.[1] The oldest manuscripts (from the Cairo Genizah)[2] do not predate the year 1000, but Rebiger convincingly demonstrates that the origins of Sefer Shimmush Tehillim are to be looked for in the early post-Talmudic, Geonic era (7th–10th centuries)[3] in Palestine or its neighboring areas. In this work, the Psalms (though not all of them) are presented in their canonical order, but only the first one or two lines are quoted, *pars pro toto*; this is followed by an indication of the purpose served by the 'use' of this Psalm, most frequently healing; then follow directions about how to 'use' the Psalm (whether to write it or say it out loud or whisper it; what kinds of writing material one has to use, paper or vellum, ink or blood, etc.); then indications are given about the magical name of the Psalm, usually found in the Psalm verses themselves by various means of Buchstabenmanipulation (*atbash, albam*, etc.); finally, there is a magico-liturgical text, usually a prayer destined to compel the demon(s) who caused

1 Bill Rebiger, ed. *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim: Buch vom magischen Gebrauch der Psalmen. Edition, Übersetzung und Kommentar*, TSAJ 137 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

2 The Genizah manuscripts were also published in Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked, eds. *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, vol. 3, TSAJ 72 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1999), 202–375.

3 In view of the fact that the Palestinian Aramaic of the text does not show the slightest influence of Arabic, but does contain several Greek loanwords, I am inclined to date the text to the earlier part of this period, the seventh to eighth centuries, though there is no certainty on this.

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the trouble to leave his/her victim alone.[4] In modern (non-critical) editions designed for practical use,[5] one finds at the end of the book an alphabetical index with the various purposes for which the book can fruitfully be used.[6] Let me give one example: the entry on Psalm 106 runs as follows:

> "Halleluja! Praise the Lord, for he is good, for his love endures for ever. Who can utter the mighty deeds of the Lord or show forth all his praise?" (vv. 1–2). It is good to write down this (Psalm) against tertian fever. One should write this Psalm in its (regular) order but also in its reverse (order), with its name, Yah Akatriel. Please heal NN, son of NN, and turn away from him this tertian fever. Let it no longer be able to strike him or any of the 248 parts of his (body), in the name of him who stretches out the heavens like a tent (Ps. 104:2). And one should hang it around one's left arm, fine and fitting. Amen. Victory. Selah.[7]

One sees how easy and simple this procedure is, and this will certainly have contributed to the popularity of the book. To quote Rebiger:

> Die Einfachkeit des Gebrauchs dieses Handbuchs, sein systematischer Aufbau und die knappe, lakonische Sprache sind sicherlich die Gründe für den anhaltenden Erfolg des wahrscheinlich populärsten magischen Handbuches im Judentum.[8]

But this is not *sortilegium*.

Another type of magical handbook that originated in the Gaonic period and is still in use in some orthodox Jewish circles is the Hebrew book of lot oracles or books of fate (Losbücher, *goralot*).[9] These books are intended to give the

4 Not all these elements are always present; sometimes the indication of which Psalm it is and for which purpose it could be used suffices.

5 For a list see Rebiger, *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim*, 13.

6 A convenient list of such 'Verwendungszwecke' can be found in Schäfer and Shaked, *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, 3:15–17.

7 Quoted after the version of ms L34, which is in §115 in Rebiger's edition.

8 Bill Rebiger, "Die magische Verwendung von Psalmen im Judentum," in *Ritual und Poesie: Formen und Orte religiöser Dichtung im Alten Orient, im Judentum und im Christentum*, ed. Erich Zenger, Herders Biblische Studien 36 (Freiburg: Herder, 2003), 265–81, here 279. The Sefer Shimmush Tehillim "achieved the distinction of being placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* of the Catholic Church," thus Joshua Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition: A Study in Folk Religion* (New York: Atheneum, 1979, repr. of 1939), 109.

9 See for a good survey of the material Evelyn Burkhardt, "Hebräische Losbuchhandschriften: Zur Typologie einer jüdischen Divinationsmethode," in *Jewish Studies between the*

user insight into the future or into things hidden from natural perception, but also to give counsel in making decisions in very difficult situations. They work by means of lots, but there are several systems varying from picking at random a number from a list, "ein Lostafel zum Zahlenstechen,"[10] to choosing from a list of questions and problems and finding the suitable answer via a complex method in which a random opening of the Bible and picking the first word or phrase that meets the eye often plays a role. This looks more like *sortilegium*, yet it is not bibliomancy because the biblical word or passage found in this way is not meant to be the answer to the question or problem; it only serves to find the right number in the list of answers by applying *gematria* to the biblical text. So the words and the meaning of the biblical text are in a sense irrelevant.[11] So in these two cases of popular medieval (and modern) magical use of the Bible, the Sefer Shimmush Tehillim and the *goralot*, we cannot speak of *sortes biblicae judaicae*. But even so, I mention them because they demonstrate clearly the phenomenon of Jewish uses of the Bible in settings other than cultic, liturgical, or educational ones. As two of the most popular magical books in Jewish history, they demonstrate both elements that play a central role in *sortes biblicae*, namely the element of finding a lot oracle in the *goralot*, and the element of magical use of the Bible in the Sefer Shimmush Tehillim. They also demonstrate the longevity of such practices because, as we will now see, these uses have a long prehistory.[12]

Magical use of Psalms is a much older phenomenon than the Sefer Shimmush Tehillim, although there is debate over how far back into history we can trace it. According to some scholars, as far back as the the first century CE we find early Jewish exegetes of the Bible interpreting 1 Sam 16:23 in such a way that David drove away the evil spirit from King Saul not only by playing

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Disciplines – Judaistik zwischen den Disziplinen: Papers in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of His Sixtieth Birthday, ed. Klaus Herrmann, Margarete Schlüter, and Giuseppe Veltri (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 95–148. The Jewish material is almost completely ignored in the otherwise excellent article by Fritz Boehm, "Losbücher," *HWDA* 5 (1933): 1386–1401.

10 Burkhardt, "Hebräische Losbuchhandschriften," 98–99. There is a clear resemblance here with the pagan Sortes Astrampsychi; see Franziska Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi: Problemlösungsstrategien durch Orakel im römischen Ägypten* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 341–43.

11 Burkhardt, "Hebräische Losbuchhandschriften," 145: "Nur in Ausnahmefällen bestanden die Orakelsprüche ganz oder teilweise aus Bibelversen.... Es besteht kein entwicklungsgeschichtlich ursprünglicher Zusammenhang zwischen hebräischen Losbüchern und jüdischer Bibliomantie." At p. 144 Burkhardt states that the medieval Jewish *goralot* were based upon Arabic Muslim originals.

12 See M. Grunwald, "Bibliomantie und Gesundbeten," *MGJV* 10 (1902): 81–98. I owe thanks to Emile Schrijver for a copy of this article.

on the harp but also by singing songs. Thus, as Josephus says, it was λέγων τε τοὺς ὕμνους καὶ ψάλλων ἐν τῇ κινύρᾳ that David accomplished this, apparently implying that David's psalms had an exorcistic effect (*Ant.* 6.168).[13] But I doubt whether that interpretation is correct because the Greek means 'by singing songs and playing on the harp,' which implies that ὕμνοι need not refer to the Psalms and ψάλλειν does not mean 'singing psalms' but 'playing a string instrument.'[14] Josephus does know the word ψαλμός for 'psalm,' and the fact that he does not use it here might indicate that in his view David did not use his own psalms to exorcise Saul's demon. But that must remain uncertain. The same is the case with the description of the same scene in Pseudo-Philo's *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum* 60. Here, to be true, the author does say that in order to drive away Saul's evil spirit, David *psallebat in cithara psalmum in nocte*, and then quotes the text of the psalm, but it is a non-biblical psalm. It may be for that reason that the most recent translator of Pseudo-Philo's work renders these words as "He played a song on his lyre by night."[15] Because we know that there were many Jewish psalms that did not make it into the biblical canon, it is unwarranted to conclude that this passage does *not* imply that Psalms were used for magical purposes. But it must at least remain uncertain.

This uncertainty also applies to two Qumranic texts, 4Q510+511, also known as 4QSongs of the Sage, dating from the turn of the era.[16] It is a collection of religious hymns in Hebrew, whose main feature is the endless praise of God; but it is also intended to protect the Sons of Light from the invisible evil spirits which seek to harm them.[17] Its language is quite similar to the biblical Psalms,[18] and this fact has brought some scholars to believe that this is a case of magical use of psalms.[19] But again, this is no proof that the canonical Psalms were used in this way, although it does suggest that it is possible that they were.

13 Thus, e.g. Rebiger, *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim*, 4 n. 11.

14 It is telling that in an earlier but similar context Saul bade David to charm away the evil spirit "with his harp and songs" (τῷ ψαλμῷ καὶ τοῖς ὕμνοις [*Ant.* 6.214]). On the other hand, when Josephus speaks about David as a composer of Psalms, he uses the words 'odes and hymns' (*Ant.* 7.305), which might imply that ὕμνοι may mean Psalms after all.

15 Howard Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo's* Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum, vol. 1 (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 187.

16 Florentino García Martínez and Eibert J. C. Tigchelaar, *The Dead Sea Scrolls Study Edition*, vol. 2 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 1026–1037.

17 Thus Gideon Bohak, *Ancient Jewish Magic: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 107.

18 Note e.g. the use of *tehillim* in 4Q510 frag. 1,1 and of *maskil* in frag. 1,4 and 4Q511 frag. 2,1.

19 E.g., Rebiger, *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim*, 5.

It is in rabbinic literature that we finally find hard evidence for the magical use of the biblical Psalms.[20] For instance, in b. Pesah. 112a, the rabbis argue that it is dangerous to drink water on the nights of Wednesday and Shabbat because there is an evil spirit in it at those times. Yet if one is really thirsty, one must recite "the seven voices," that is, Ps 29:3–9, beginning with "The voice of the Lord is upon the waters" and continuing with six other verses containing the phrase "the voice of the Lord." After that one can safely drink water. In b. Shev. 15b, the apotropaic use of Ps 91 is strongly recommended,[21] for instance, as a protection during sleep.[22] It is the very same, particularly popular Ps 91 that one finds so often recited in the magical spells on the Aramaic incantation bowls from late antiquity.[23] So we do have evidence for magical use of Psalms in late antiquity.

But do we also have evidence for the existence of *goralot*, books of lots, in Jewish antiquity? As far as I know we do not. That is to say, we do not have them in the form that we know of *goralot* from medieval and modern times. What we have to investigate, however, is whether the Bible itself, in Hebrew or Greek, was used as a book of lots (as it is up to the present day in some Christian circles).[24] Was there early Jewish *sortilegium* with the Bible? In order to investigate that matter we will first have to step back for a moment and consider briefly the closely related problem of the rise of the holy book in ancient Judaism.

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20 Good discussion in Rebiger, "Die magische Verwendung von Psalmen" 269–70, and Rebiger, *Sefer Shimmush Tehillim*, 6–8. See also Lajos Blau, *Das altjüdische Zauberwesen* (Westmead: Gregg International, 1970, repr. of 1898), 71; Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic and Superstition*, 112–13.

21 E.g. Ps 91:1, "He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High"; Ps 91:7, "A thousand may fall at your side, ten thousand at your right hand, but it will not come near you"; Ps 91:10, "No evil shall befall you, no scourge come near your tent." On the apotropaic use of Ps 91 see Hermann L. Strack and Paul Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch*, vol. 4 (München: Beck, 1928), 529.

22 It may be for that reason that Ps 91 is also a favourite Psalm in early Christian epitaphs.

23 E.g. Peter Schäfer and Shaul Shaked, eds. *Magische Texte aus der Kairoer Geniza*, vol. 2, TSAJ 64 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1997), no. 30 frag. 1b, 17; Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Amulets and Magic Bowls: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1985), no. 11; Lawrence H. Schiffman and Micahel D. Swartz, *Hebrew and Aramaic Incantations from the Cairo Genizah* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1992), 78. See also Joseph Naveh and Shaul Shaked, *Magic Spells and Formulae: Aramaic Incantations of Late Antiquity* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1993), 24–25. On the popularity of Ps 91 in Jewish magic see Trachtenberg, *Jewish Magic*, 112–13.

24 For ancient Christianity see Harry Y. Gamble, *Books and Readers in the Early Church* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), 237–41.

The concept of sacred books was not as widespread in antiquity as one may be inclined to think. The Greeks and Romans did without them for the most part of their religious history, at least before the Hellenistic period, although there were exceptions in some circles (e.g., the Orphics).[25] The Jewish people did not have sacred books until far into their national history; it was only during the Babylonian exile (sixth century BCE) and thereafter that the Pentateuch (Torah) was given its present shape and began to gain 'canonical' status.[26] The Christians of course had their sacred books right from the beginning[27] in the form of the Jewish Bible (in Greek), and in the course of the first three centuries of its development the church also gradually bestowed canonical status upon the books of the New Testament. The bestowing of canonical status and the attribution of holiness mostly go hand in hand, or to put it more precisely, a book's canonical status is the absolute prerequisite for its being regarded as sacred or holy.[28] For instance, the increasing centrality of the Torah in Judaism in the post-exilic period (after 538 BCE), certainly after and due to the reforms by Ezra (fifth to fourth centuries), led to a heightened awareness of the Torah's holiness.[29] In the Hebrew Bible, the Torah itself is not yet adorned with the epithet 'holy.' We see this starting to happen only in the Hellenistic period. In the second half of the second century BCE, Pseudo-Aristeas, the author of a pseudonymous work on the origin of the Septuagint, is the first to call the Torah holy, divine, and reverend (ἁγνός, θεῖος, σεμνός).[30] Thus he reports that the Ptolemaic king of Egypt prostrates himself[31] in adoration of the first Torah

25 Roland Baumgarten, *Heiliges Wort und Heilige Schrift bei den Griechen. Hieroi Logoi und verwandte Erscheinungen* (Tübingen: Gunter Narr Verlag, 1998); Carsten Colpe, "Heilige Schriften," *RAC* 14 (1988): 197–98.

26 I put the word canonical in quotation marks because it is used here in an anachronistic way.

27 Colpe, "Heilige Schriften," 208: "Das Christentum ist von Anfang an Schrift – oder Buchreligion gewesen."

28 Colpe, "Heilige Schriften," 205: "Die Kanonizität, wie immer sie zustande kam, ist hier … deshalb zu erwähnen, weil offenbar erst über sie diese Schriften 'heilige' wurden." See also Jan N. Bremmer, "From Holy Books to Holy Bible: An Itinerary from Ancient Greece to Modern Islam via Second Temple Judaism and Early Christianity," in Mladen Popović, ed. *Authoritative Scriptures in Ancient Judaism*, JSJS 141 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 327–60, esp. 336–47 on early Judaism.

29 On the analogy with the Babylonian cult of images see Karel van der Toorn, "The Iconic Book: Analogies Between the Babylonian Cult of Images and the Veneration of the Torah," in Karel van der Toorn, ed. *The Image and the Book: Iconic Cults, Aniconism, and the Rise of Book Religion in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Leuven: Peeters, 1997), 229–48.

30 Let. Aris. 3, 5, 31, 45; cf. 313.

31 On prostration in this context see Thomas Ohm, *Die Gebetsgebärden der Völker und das Christentum* (Leiden: Brill, 1948), 340–71.

scroll in Greek and speaks of "these oracles (λόγια) of God" for which he thanks God (§177).[32] Also such widely different writings as Jubilees, 4 Ezra, various documents from Qumran,[33] and authors such as Philo and Josephus emphasize the holiness of the Torah on account of its divine origin.[34] Not surprisingly, inspiration theories on the genesis of this holy Scripture soon make their appearance.[35] Whether or not one is happy with the term 'religion of the book' or 'book religion,' if this term indicates that a holy book has become the central locus of divine revelation in a religion, it certainly seems to apply to Second Temple Judaism.[36] It is probably no coincidence that the first attestations of the existence of synagogues date precisely from the period in which the Torah is called for the first time a holy and divine book.[37] And it is in exactly the same

32 For this and the following, see Oda Wischmeyer, "Das Heilige Buch im Judentum des Zweiten Tempels," *ZNW* 86 (1995): 218–42; at p. 223 Wischmeyer rightly points out that this reverend attitude is already found in the fragments of the exegete Aristobulus, even though he does not use the word 'holy' for the Pentateuch. For the typology of the holy book in antiquity in general, see e.g. Johannes Leipoldt and Siegfried Morenz, *Heilige Schriften* (Leipzig: Otto Harrassowitz, 1953); Wolfgang Speyer, "Das Buch als magisch-religiöser Kraftträger im griechischen und römischen Altertum," in Speyer, *Religionsgeschichtliche Studien* (Hildesheim: Olms, 1995), 28–55; Michael D. Swartz, *Scholastic Magic: Ritual and Revelation in Early Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 200–1. Bremmer, "From Holy Books to Holy Bible," 339, remarks that Alexander Polyhistor, when excerpting the work of the Jewish historian Demetrius, twice uses the expression 'the holy book' (ἡ ἱερά βίβλος) when referring to the Pentateuch; see Demetrius, frag. 3 and 4, in Carl R. Holladay, *Fragments from Hellenistic Jewish Authors*, vol. 1: *Historians* (Chico: Scholars Press, 1983), 74–77. Since Alexander Polyhistor was not a Jew, he may use here Demetrius' own terminology; see also Helmut Burkhardt, *Die Inspiration heiliger Schriften bei Philo* (Giessen-Basel: Brunnen, 1988), 88. For the Emperor Augustus' use of the term 'holy books' (ἱεραὶ βίβλοι) when referring to the Pentateuch in a letter preserved by Josephus, *Ant.* 16.164, see Monika Schuol, *Augustus und die Juden: Rechtsstellung und Interessenpolitik der kleinasiatischen Diaspora*, Studien zur alten Geschichte 6 (Frankfurt: Verlag Antike, 2007), 86–95, esp. 88–89.

33 See Wischmeyer, "Das Heilige Buch" 229–33. Also Paul in Rom 7:12: "the Law is holy."

34 Bremmer, "From Holy Books to Holy Bible," 340–41.

35 E.g. Burkhardt, *Die Inspiration heiliger Schriften*; Dietrich-Alex Koch, "Inspiration-Theopneustie (II)," *RGG*[4] (2001): 168–69; and s.v. 'inspiration' in the index to Magne Sæbø, ed. *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament: The History of Its Interpretation*, vol. 1, 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1996), 791.

36 See the important article by Bernhard Lang, "Buchreligion," in *Handbuch religionswissenschaftlicher Grundbegriffe*, vol 2: *Apokalptik – Geschichte*, ed. Hubert Cancik et al. (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1990), 143–65.

37 For the connection between synagogue and holiness of the Torah, see Pieter W. van der Horst, "Was the Synagogue a Place of Sabbath Worship Before 70?" in Steven Fine, ed. *Jews, Christians, and Polytheists in the Ancient Synagogue: Cultural Interaction during the Graeco-Roman Period* (New York: Routledge, 1999), 18–43, reprinted in Van der Horst,

period, and in this context, that we also see the emergence of the use of the Torah as an oracle book.

Let me present the two earliest examples from First and Second Maccabees (actually, they are two versions of one and the same story).[38] In the first passage we read:

> καὶ ἐξεπέτασαν τὸ βιβλίον τοῦ νόμου περὶ ὧν ἐξηρεύνων τὰ ἔθνη τὰ ὁμοιώματα τῶν εἰδώλων αὐτῶν.
>
> And they opened (unrolled) the book of the Law to inquire into those matters about which the gentiles consulted the images of their idols.
>
> 1 Macc 3:48

This translation does not go uncontested. In his commentary on First Maccabees, Goldstein translates as follows: "They spread open the scroll of the Torah at the passages where the gentiles sought to find analogies to their idols," and he defends this translation by stating that "Antiochus IV attempted to use the Torah to prove that illicit 'pagan' rites and deities belonged in the religion of Israel."[39] I fail to see, however, how this can make sense of the passage in this context. I prefer to follow Schunck's translation: "Dann rollten sie das Buch des Gesetzes auf – in der gleichen Absicht, in der die Heiden die Bilder ihrer Götzen befragen." He adds in a note *ad locum*:

> Gemeint ist ein Öffnen des Buches des Gesetzes aufs Geratewohl, um aus der dabei aufgeschlagenen Textstelle ein Gottesantwort über den Ausgang des geplanten Kampfes zu erhalten. Analog befragten die anderen Völker ihre Götter bzw. deren Abbilder.[40]

The differing translations are of course a consequence of the different interpretations of the Greek words περὶ ὧν ἐξηρεύνων τὰ ἔθνη. I am convinced that this translation problem has been correctly described and solved by the French scholar Abel in his commentary on First Maccabees when he states:

Japheth in the Tents of Shem: Studies on Jewish Hellenism in Antiquity, CBET 32 (Leuven: Peeters, 2002), 55–82.

38 I follow Wischmeyer's convincing interpretation of both passages in 1–2 Macc ("Das Heilige Buch" 226–27). For other views, see the commentaries of Jonathan A. Goldstein, *1 Maccabees*, AB 41 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1976), *ad loc.*

39 Goldstein, *1 Maccabees*, 256, 261–62.

40 Klaus-Dietrich Schunck, *1. Makkabäerbuch*, JSHRZ I 4 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1980), 312.

> περὶ ὧν se rapporte non à βιβλίον mais au but de l'action du verbe susdit, étant une construction elliptique fondée sur l'omission de la préposition répétée et de l'antecédent du relatif (…) équivalente de περὶ [τούτων περὶ] ὧν, et en vertu de la relation la formule sert à marquer également l'objet *circa quod* du verbe suivant.[41]

The context is as follows: in the middle of the sixties of the second century BCE the Seleucid king Antiochus IV tried to enforce a hellenization of the Jewish cult in the Jerusalem temple. The Jewish opposition was organised by the priest Mattathias and his five sons, later known as the Maccabees. They were confronted by a huge military power and faced overwhelming odds. The Jewish army fasted and prayed, and just before the decisive battle they consulted the book of the Law. In the same way in which the gentiles by various means of divination tried to receive a verdict from their gods about the outcome of their enterprises, the Jews opened the Torah scroll at random in the hope that the first line their eyes hit upon would instruct them about what God had in store for them or expected them to do. What in former times had been the role of a prophet (or of the oracular Urim und Thummim) was now taken over by the Law scroll.[42] Whatever the historicity of the story, it is at any rate clear that in the final quarter of the second century BCE a Jewish author presented the Torah scroll as a book that could be consulted as an oracle book by opening it at random. Of course, the Jews won the battle.[43]

In Second Maccabees (written somewhat later than First Maccabees, but using the second century BCE author Jason of Cyrene as his main source)[44] we read why they won in a different version of the same story:

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41 Felix-Marie Abel, *Les Livres des Maccabées* (Paris: Gabalda, 1949), 69–70. Between brackets, Abel refers to Raphael Kühner, Friedrich Blass, and Bernhard Gerth, *Ausführliche Grammatik der griechischen Sprache. Zweiter Teil: Satzlehre*, 2 vols. (Hannover: Hahnsche Buchhandlung, 1898, repr. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1966), §451, 4 and §555, 2.

42 See Jan Thomas Nelis, *1 Makkabeeën* (Roermond: Romen, 1972) 106.

43 A different interpretation of this passage is proposed by Robert Wisniewski. "Pagans, Jews, Christians, and a Type of Book Divination in Late Antiquity," *JECS* 24 (2016): 553–68. At pp. 560–61, he argues that this cannot be a form of bibliomancy since the text "does not say what the consultants found in the book." He suggests that Judas may have checked Deut 20:5–8 to see what were the rules of proper conduct in a war. This is very unlikely. One does not look up the rules of conduct in a war at the moment the battle begins; and pagans did not consult the statues of their gods to get to know the rules of warfare.

44 For discussion and bibliography of this author see Martin Goodman in Emil Schürer, *The History of the Jewish People in the Age of Jesus Christ*, vol. III 1, ed. G. Vermes, F. Millar, and M. Goodman (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1986), 531–37.

παραναγνοὺς τὴν ἱερὰν βίβλον καὶ δοὺς σύνθημα θεοῦ βοηθείας τῆς πρώτης σπείρας αὐτὸς προηγούμενος συνέβαλε τῷ Νικάνορι.

He [i.e. Judas the Maccabee] read the holy book publicly[45] and gave 'The help of God' as a watchword [or motto]. Then leading the first division himself, he joined battle with Nicanor [the Seleucid general].

2 Macc 8:23[46]

Now we do not find the expression 'Help of God' anywhere in the Torah, but the motif of God's help is of course common enough in the Torah (one might think of Exod 14:14, "The Lord shall fight for you," said in a similar context) and, moreover, unlike 1 Macc. 3:48, the text does not state that they read from the book of the Law (Torah) but from 'the holy book,' which might also imply the Prophets or the Psalms.[47] Here again, a random opening of canonical books provides the leader of the resistance army with a motto that is the clue to what is going to happen in the battle: God will help them and hence they will be victorious.[48] (In this connection, it is intriguing to see what the Mishnah states, that when a king of Israel goes forth to battle, he should take with him a scroll of the Torah [m. Sanh. 2:4], although there it is not specified for what purpose he should do so.)[49]

45 The rare verb παραναγιγνώσκειν means 'to read in public' or 'to read in someone's presence'; see e.g. 3 Macc. 1:12; Philo, *Flacc.* 100; and LSJ s.v. παραναγιγνώσκω.

46 Christian Habicht, *2. Makkabäerbuch*, JSHRZ I 3 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1976), 241, translates: "Nachdem er in die Heilige Schrift Einblick genommen hatte, gab er die Parole 'Gottes Hilfe' aus und stieß, selbst an der Spitze der ersten Abteilung, mit Nikanor zusammen."

47 Habicht, *2. Makkabäerbuch*, 241 note *ad locum* even suggests: "Die Stelle ist Ps 3,9: τοῦ κυρίου ἡ σωτηρία Vgl. in der 'Kriegsrolle' von Qumran 4,14 'Gottes Hilfe' als eine der Standartenaufschriften der aus der Schlacht heimkehrenden Söhnen des Lichts." In the *War Scroll* we find a whole series of short biblical expressions written on the banners of the eschatological army, among which 'help of God.'

48 Daniel R. Schwartz, *2 Maccabees*, CEJL (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 340: "It seems, as is indicated by the parallel at *1 Maccabees* 3:48, that the reference is to a type of divination: a chance opening of the Bible and selection of a text, on the assumption that God himself is guiding the choice." Again, Wisniewski ("Pagans, Jews, Christians," 561) categorically states that "what we can see in this episode is certainly not a divinatory procedure," but without presenting a convincing alternative.

49 Wisniewski ("Pagans, Jews, Christians" 562) argues against the existence of ancient Jewish bibliomancy by stating that "one could hardly open a scroll at random." But (1) that is not true (it is less easy than in the case of a codex but definitely not impossible); and (2) in the imperial period most Greek-speaking Jewish diaspora communities possessed a Greek Bible in codex format.

This is new in the history of the Jewish religion. In previous centuries, especially in the pre-exilic period, it was the prophets or some form of oracular device called the Urim and the Thummim (probably sacred dice with 'yes' and 'no' answers) that the Israelites turned to in order to consult God.[50] But in the Hellenistic period one consulted the divinely inspired sacred book(s), which came more and more to be regarded as the repository of all knowledge and wisdom. The underlying assumption was that God himself guided and controlled this process of consultation. It was this period in which Judaism developed slowly but definitely into a 'religion of the book.'[51] And it is this circumstance that made possible the development of the Torah into an oracle-book.[52] My doubt about this interpretation of these two passages, however, concerns the fact that they do not *explicitly* state that this consultation of the holy book was a *random* procedure. I will come back to that at the end of this chapter.

We see a similar phenomenon in the rabbinic literature of the Roman and early Byzantine period, albeit there usually in a completely different form, namely, in the cledonomantic form of stories about biblical verses rehearsed by schoolchildren and inquired after or overheard by rabbis.[53] Let me quote a few examples. We read in b. Hul. 95b that Rav Samuel wrote letters from Babylon to Rabbi Johanan in Palestine which so impressed the latter that he decided to visit this great master there. In order to make sure that this was the right decision, he asked a child, "What is the last biblical verse you have learned?" The answer was from 1 Sam 28:3, "Now Samuel was dead." Even though this was said about the biblical prophet Samuel, it was clear to Rabbi Johanan that God wanted to inform him that it no longer made sense to go to Babylon. The Talmud adds that later Rav Samuel turned out to be alive after all, but that God had wanted to save Johanan the hardships of the long and arduous trip! Another example is about the famous scholar Elisha ben Avuya, who became a

50 Christopher T. Begg, "Inquire of God," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 3:417–18.

51 Lang, "Buchreligion" 145: "Haben sich die heiligen Schriften einmal durchgesetzt und in einem Prozess der Kanonbildung allgemeine Anerkennung gefunden und damit zur Konsolidierung einer Religionsgemeinschaft entscheidend beigetragen, dann wirken sie als erstrangige Kulturmacht in alle Lebensbereiche hinein."

52 Cf. Speyer, "Das Buch als magisch-religiöser Kraftträger," 39: "Überall, wo im Altertum von Heiligen Schriften … die Rede ist, galt das Buch als magisch-religiöser Kraftträger."

53 For the idea that prophecy has been given to children, see b. B. Bat. 12b; the passage is referred to in Louis Isaac Rabinowitz, "Divination," in *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Fred Skolnik and Michael Berenbaum, 22 vols. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2007), 2:706. On cledonomancy see Sarah I. Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008) 131.

notorious heretic and thus earned the nickname Aher ('the other one').[54] This example is also from the Babylonian Talmud, b. Hag. 15a–b (in a baraitha):

> Once Aher was riding on a horse on the Sabbath, and R. Meir was walking behind him to learn Torah from his mouth. He [Aher] said to him: "Meir, turn back, for I have already measured by the paces of my horse that thus far extends the Sabbath limit." He replied: "You, too, go back!" He [Aher] answered: "Have I not told you that I have already heard from behind the Veil, "Return, ye backsliding children" [Jer 3:22] – except Aher?" He [R. Meir] prevailed upon him and took him to a schoolhouse. He [Aher] said to a child: "Recite for me your verse!" He [the child] answered: "There is no peace, says the Lord, unto the wicked" [Isa 48:22]. He [R. Meir] then took him to another schoolhouse. He [Aher] said to a child: "Recite for me your verse!" He answered: "For though thou wash thee with nitre, and take thee much soap, yet thine iniquity is marked before me, says the Lord God" [Jer 2:22]. He [R. Meir] took him to yet another schoolhouse, and he [Aher] said to a child: "Recite for me your verse!" He answered: "And thou, that are spoiled, what doest thou, that thou clothest thyself with scarlet, that thou deckest thee with ornaments of gold, that thou enlargest thine eyes with paint? In vain doest thou make thyself fair" [Jer 4:30]. He took him to yet another schoolhouse until he took him to thirteen schools, and all of them quoted in similar vein.[55]

Here it is not a matter of opening the holy book at random, but of a random questioning of children in the expectation that the first biblical verse they will quote contains God's message for that particular situation, in this case God's condemnation and rejection of Aher as an apostate.[56] But the principle is

54 On Aher see E. E. Urbach, *The Sages: Their Concepts and Beliefs* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1975), 465–66, and the (uncritical) collection of material in Gershom Bader, *The Encyclopedia of Talmudic Sages* (London: Aronson, 1988), 303–10.

55 Cf. b. Hul. 95b: "Rav used to regard [the arrival of] a ferry-boat as an omen, Samuel [a passage in] a book, and R. Johanan [a verse quoted] by a child." Also b. Git. 58a (a baraitha): "R. Joshua ben Hananiah once happened to go to the great city of Rome, and he was told there that there was in prison a child with beautiful eyes and face and curly locks. He went and stood at the doorway of the prison and said: 'Who gave Jacob for a spoil and Israel to the robbers?' [Isa 42:24]. The child answered: 'Is it not the Lord, He against whom we have sinned and in whose ways they would not walk, neither were they obedient unto his law?' [Isa 42:24]."

56 See also Midrash Mishle 6.20, where Elisha (Aher) tells: 'Once I entered a synagogue and saw a student sitting in front of his teacher who was making him recite Scripture. The teacher recited first, 'And to the wicked (*we-la-rasha'*) God said, Who are you to recite My

the same: since all that God had, has, and will have to say to humankind is contained in the Torah (in the sense of Tanakh), and since he can be trusted to guide and control this process of consultation, the answer is incontrovertible, in fact a prophecy (*nevu'ah*).[57] As one of the early rabbis, ben Bag-Bag, is reported to have said about the Torah, "Turn it, and turn it again [i.e. study it from every angle] for *everything is in it*" (m. Avot 5:22), not only everything of the past, but also of the present and of the future.

In yet another passage from the Babylonian Talmud, b. Ta'an. 9a, in a discussion of the meaning of a difficult biblical verse, the rabbis ask a young boy to quote the biblcal passage he has learned that day in order to elucidate their verse. And finally, in a rabbinic commentary on the book of Esther, we read that when Mordechai heard about Haman's plan to destroy the Jews in the Persian empire, he saw three children coming from school and asked them to repeat the biblical verses they had just learned. The first one recites Prov 3:25 ("Be not afraid of sudden terror, neither of the destruction of the wicked, when it comes"), while the other two quote verses which convince him that God will see to it that Mordechai's countermeasures will be succesful (Esther Rabba 7.13, *ad* 3:9).[58]

The next case I want to discuss is a borderline case. It could be dealt with under the chapter 'Jewish evidence' but also under 'Christian evidence.' It is the famous passage in the Gospel of Luke in which Jesus reads two verses from

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laws?' (Ps 50:16). Then the student repeated it, 'And to Elisha (*u-le-Elisha'*) God said, Who are you to recite My laws, and mouth the terms of My covenant?' When I heard that, I said, 'The decree against me has already been sealed from above.' Trans. (slightly modified) by Burton L. Visotzky, *The Midrash on Proverbs* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 41. Here the slip of the tongue by the student is taken by Elisha as an omen.

57 See Samuel Krauss, *Talmudische Archäologie*, vol. 3 (Leipzig: Buchhandlung Gustav Fock, 1912), 228–29 and esp. the notes at 352–53.

58 See also b. Git. 56a and 68a; Genesis Rabba 52.4; Midrash Tehillim 93.8. Comparable in a sense is Rabbi Johanan's dictum: "If one rises early and a scriptural verse comes to one's mouth, this is a kind of minor prophecy" (b. Ber. 55b; I owe this reference to Philip Alexander). Further instances and discussion in Saul Lieberman, *Hellenism in Jewish Palestine* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary, 1962, repr. of 1950), 194–99. Louis Jacobs, *The Jewish Religion: A Companion* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), 132, says that in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries "Lithuanian Rabbis were in the habit of using a type of bibliomancy known as 'the Lot of Elijah, Gaon of Wilna,' although there is no evidence whatsoever that the attribution to the Gaon is correct. So far as one can tell, the usual method was to flip through the pages of the Hebrew Bible at random and then count seven pages from the place where a particular page opened. Seven lines from the top of this page provided the verse for the divination." Moses Gaster, "Divination (Jewish)," in *Encyclopedia of Religion and Ethics*, ed. James Hastings (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1908–1927), 4:812, is informative about Jewish bibliomancy in the early Medieval post-Talmudic period.

the prophet Isaiah (Isa 61:1–2) in the synagogue of Nazareth (Luke 4:16–21) and adds that "today this scriptural passage has been fulfilled as you are listening."[59] Pierre Courcelle illustrates his statement, "le découverte d'un oracle par *apertio libri* existait aussi dans le monde juif," by referring to this passage which he interprets as follows: "Luc IV, 16–22, nous montre Jésus faisant office de lecteur à la synagogue et tirant ainsi le verset d'Isaïe LXI, 1–2, que tous considèrent comme un oracle qui le concerne."[60] If this interpretation is correct, it depends upon the degree of historicity one is willing to ascribe to this scene, whether one regards this as Jewish or Christian evidence.[61] If the story reflects factual circumstances, it may be regarded as Jewish (Jesus was a Jew); if it is largely a Lukan fabrication, it may be regarded as Christian (Luke was a Christian). But I think Pierre Courcelle reads more into this text than is warranted. Although we do not know as much about synagogal lectionary systems in the first century as we would like, it is hardly imaginable that a lector in a synagogue could choose his pericope at random. If the so-called *haphtarah* system (i.e. the reading of a section from the Prophets after the Torah reading) was already in use then – which is uncertain – it would seem to be excluded, because a fixed order was followed in that system. Since it is not unlikely that there was already a fixed reading system in first-century Palestine,[62] it would seem that we should not regard this story as evidence of Jewish *sortilegium*. Even if there were no reason to think of an assigned passage from Isaiah, "there is no reason either to take this phrase to mean a chance happening upon ch. 61. It sounds as if Jesus deliberately sought out the passage."[63]

Returning to the cledonomantic form of sortilegium that we found in rabbinic literature, we have to discuss briefly a theory that was proposed by Moses Gaster a century ago.[64] Gaster argued that the custom of asking a child to recite 'his' biblical verse has its origin in the fact that some biblical passages describe a form of divination from the opening words of an interlocutor or

59 The passage under consideration does not occur in the parallel versions of Matt 13 and Mark 6.

60 Pierre Courcelle, "L'enfant et les 'sorts bibliques,'" *VC* 7 (1953): 194–220 at 200 n. 21; see also Courcelle, "Divination," *RAC* 3 (1957): 1248–1250.

61 The historicity of the details under discussion is a complicated matter, partly due to the fact that the other Gospel writers do not have them. See e.g. the discussion by Joseph Fitzmyer, *The Gospel According to Luke*, vol. 1 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1981), 526–28.

62 See Ben Zion Wacholder's prolegomenon to Jacob Mann, *The Bible as Read and Preached in the Old Synagogue*, vol. 1 (New York: KTAV, 1971), esp. xiii–xx. See also Larrimore C. Crockett, "Luke iv.16–30 and the Jewish Lectionary Cycle: A Word of Caution," *JJS* 17 (1966): 13–46.

63 Fitzmyer, *Luke*, 1:532. See also the discussion by François Bovon, *Das Evangelium nach Lukas*, vol. 1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1989), 211.

64 Gaster, "Divination," 806–14, esp. 812.

even an enemy. Let me briefly review some of this biblical material. In Gen 24, Abraham's servant is looking for a suitable wife for Abraham's son Isaac. When he arrives in Aram-Naharaim, he prays to the Lord:

> Here I stand by the spring as the daughters of the townsmen come out to draw water. Let the maiden to whom I say, "Please, lower your jar that I may drink," and who replies, "Drink, and I will also water your camels," let her be the one whom You have decreed for Your servant Isaac. Thereby shall I know that You have dealt graciously with my master.
>
> Gen 24:13–14

Another example comes from Judges, where God commands Gideon to go close to the camp of the Midianites. There he overhears a Midianite soldier telling his friend a dream that signifies their defeat: "Listen to what they say; after that you will have the courage to attack the camp" (Judg 7:11). When Gideon hears the dream and its interpretation, he knows that God will give them victory. Furthermore, in First Samuel, David's son Jonathan wants to attack an outpost of the Philistines. He says to his arms-bearer:

> We will cross over to those men and let them see us. If they say to us, "Wait until we get to you," then we will stay where we are and not go up to them. But if they say, "Come up to us," then we will go up, for the Lord is delivering them into our hands. That shall be our sign.
>
> 1 Sam 14:8–12

And when in 1 Kings 20:33 king Achab calls the king of Aram, Benhadad, who had been defeated by Achab, "my brother," the king's ministers take this to be a good omen to the effect that Benhadad will be spared. The verb used for their interpretation of the word brother, *nachash*, basically means 'to practise divination.' These four instances may suffice to show that biblical Israel indeed knew a form of divination on the basis of the first word(s) spoken by someone else in a critical situation. But is that a satisfactory explanation for the rise of cledonomantic sortilegium as we see it in rabbinic literature? At best it can only be a partial explanation, because although it shows the phenomenon of assigning divinatory meaning to first-spoken words was a well known phenomenon, it does not explain that, first, in the rabbinic evidence it is always children who speak the first words, and that, second, these words are always biblical verses. As to the first element, it reminds one of a remark by Plutarch, who says that "the Egyptians believe that children have the power of

divination, and they take omens especially from children's shouts as they play near the temples and say whatever occurs to them" (*Is. Os.* 14, 356E).[65] But it was certainly not only the ancient Egyptians who cherished such beliefs; think of the role of children's words in the famous *tolle lege* scene in the story of Augustine's conversion in a garden in Milan (*Conf.* 8.12.29). The use of children in cleromancy is also attested by Callimachus, *Epigr.* 1, Cicero, *Div.* 2.86, and Tibullus, *Eleg.* 1.3.9–13.[66] And perhaps we may even find Jewish evidence for this belief in passages such as 1 En. 106.3, Lad. Jac. 7.6, and Matt 21:15–16.[67] Though it is very hard to prove, it might be that here we have a case of external (Graeco-Roman) influence on the mantic theories of the rabbis. As to the fact that only biblical verses count as omens when first uttered by children, I would suggest that the 'external influence' is thereby effectively neutralized, or rather 'judaized,' because it indicates that it is only the God of Israel who guides this cledonomantic process.

Let me add some final remarks on the problem of priority and dependence. Is there any reason to assume that the Jewish use of sacred books as lot oracles was influenced by pagan Graeco-Roman examples? As far as biblical *sortilegium* among Christians is concerned, one can clearly observe that in the case of the Sortes Astrampsychi there was a smooth transition from the pagan to the Christian form of this lot oracle.[68] This suggests that at least in

65 John Gwyn Griffiths, *Plutarch: De Iside et Osiride* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1970), 315, refers to parallels in Xenophon of Ephesus, *Aeth.* 5.4 and Aelian, *Nat. anim.* 11.10.

66 Sarah I. Johnston, "Charming Children: The Use of the Child in Ancient Divination," *Arethusa* 34 (2001): 97–117. Johnston argues that children were often perceived as not only pure (cf. PGM 7.544: "the child should be unspoilt and pure") but also unimaginative and closed to outside influences and, for that reason, reliable witnesses. Cf. Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 208: "Childhood and prophecy … were natural allies." See further Cristiano Grottanelli, '*Sorte unica pro casibus pluribus enotata*: Literary Texts and Lot Inscriptions as Sources for Ancient Kleromancy,' in Sarah I. Johnston, ed. *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, RGRW155 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 132. On the two passages referred to in the text above see Arthur Stanley Pease, *M. Tulli Ciceronis de divinatione libri duo* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1963, repr. of 1923), 494–95, and Kirby Flower Smith, *The Elegies of Albius Tibullus* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1971, repr. of 1913), 236–37.

67 See W. D. Davies and Dale C. Allison, *The Gospel according to Saint Matthew*, vol. 3 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1997), 141 n. 53.

68 Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, passim. On Christian reactions to the phenomenon of *sortilegium*, see Valerie Flint, "The Demonisation of Magic and Sorcery in Late Antiquity: Christian Redefinitions of Pagan Religions," in *Witchcraft and Magic in Europe*, vol. 2: *Ancient Greece and Rome*, ed. Bengt Ankarloo, Stuart Clark, and Valerie Flint (London: Athlone Press, 1999), 277–348, esp. 342; also Courcelle, "Divination"; and Ramsay

Christian circles influence of pagan practices of prognostication by means of lot oracles may have played an important role. But as far as the Jewish material is concerned, the situation is much less clear. Part of the problem is that our earliest testimonies to this practice in both circles are somewhat problematic. The two passages in the books of the Maccabees I discussed earlier are interpreted by some scholars in a very different way than I (and others) did, and on their interpretation we have to conclude that the earliest evidence for *sortes biblicae* among Jews is to be found not in the books of the Maccabees but only much later, in the rabbinic literature of the third to sixth centuries CE. And as we have seen, almost all instances found there are different from the pagan material in that the method used is not casting lots or opening books at random, but rather a more cledonomantic approach in the form of hearing children reciting the last biblical verse they have learned at school. The first pagan evidence is even more problematic.[69] Aristophanes' *Pax* 1089–1094, which quotes "an oracle written by Homer," contains only Homeric phraseology but not Homeric verses.[70] It is a parody, to be sure. But can it be regarded as hard evidence that Homer's poems were used for oracular purposes as early as the fifth century BCE? I am slightly inclined to think so, but I am also doubtful because I have to admit that the passage in Aristophanes is no compelling proof.[71] Furthermore, how could we explain the large chronological gap between this passage from the fifth century BCE and the next pieces of pagan evidence, namely an unambiguous passage from Pseudo-Plutarch about the use of Homer for oracular purposes (*De Homero* 2.218.4), the testimony of Cassius Dio (*Hist.* 79.8.6) and the earliest papyri with a Homeromanteion (PGM VII and P.Oxy 3831), all of them dating from the third century CE?[72] In the middle of the first century BCE,

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MacMullen, *Christianity and Paganism in the Fourth to Eighth Centuries* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1997), 237–38 notes 128–131.

69 It is discussed in Van der Horst, "Sortes: Sacred Books as Instant Oracles in Late Antiquity," in idem, *Japheth in the Tents of Shem*, 159–89, esp. 175–87.

70 Cf. Stuart Douglas Olson, *Aristophanes' Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 278: "Not, in fact, a passage straight from Homer but a mixture of Homeric verses, verse-fragments, and free composition which includes some Homeric forms and vocabulary."

71 However, Baumgarten (*Heiliges Wort*, 38–69) has shown that the fifth century BCE was a period in which oracle collections began to circulate widely in ancient Greece. In late antiquity and the early Byzantine period, paraphrases of biblical stories in the form of Homeric *centones* were also in use among Christians; see Andre-Louis Rey, "*Homerocentra* et littérature apocryphe chrétienne," *Apocrypha* 7 (1996): 123–34.

72 On magical use of the Homeric poetry in general see the excellent discussion by Derek Collins, *Magic in the Ancient Greek World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2008), 104–31, esp. 122–25 on *Homeromanteia*. For an improved edition of the best preserved Homeromanteion (in

in his *De divinatione*, Cicero does not even mention Homeric *sortilegium* in his survey of divinatory methods of the nations he knew! This gap of more than six centuries is very strange and makes me suspicious. If we leave the debatable early evidence aside for the moment, we see that the remaining material is almost all from late antiquity, the third through the sixth centuries CE: on the pagan side, the aforementioned papyri, the passages from Dio Cassius and Pseudo-Plutarch, the papyri of the Sortes Astrampsychi, and the material about the Sortes Vergilianae in the Historia Augusta; on the Jewish side, the Babylonian Talmud and the rabbinic midrashim; and, moreover, on the Christian side, passages from Athanasius and Augustine, the Sortes Sangallenses, the papyri of the Gospel of John with *hermēneiai*, and the warnings by various councils and synods of the church.[73] There is such a concentration of the evidence in the centuries between 200 and 600 CE that I feel strongly inclined to assume that the whole practice of *sortilegium* originated only by the beginning of that period, and that the isolated passages from the books of the Maccabees and Aristophanes' *Pax* have to be explained differently. However, that would be too easy an escape. In view of the high status of Homer in the Greek world[74] and of the Bible among the Jews in the early Hellenistic period, it was to be expected that this kind of practice would develop in a world in which other forms of cleromancy were already current. Viewed in the context of their time, the passages from Aristophanes and the books of the Maccabees are no *corpora aliena*. One could rather say it is strange that we do not have more evidence for this practice from the pre-Christian centuries. It may be a matter of mere chance and of the vicissitudes of the history of textual transmission that we do not have more data from an earlier period. But all this remains speculation.

Be that as it may, the scarcity of evidence does not permit us to determine whether or not the Jewish practice of *sortilegium* developed under Greek influence, as did so many other post-biblical practices in Judaism, also in the

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PGM VII), see Franco Maltomini, "P. Lond. 121 (= PGM VII, 1–221): Homeromanteion," *ZPE* 106 (1995): 107–22. Veit Rosenberger, *Griechische Orakel: Eine Kulturgeschichte* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2001), 41, states about the two above mentioned *Homeromanteia*: "Auch wenn die beide Texte aus dem 3. oder 4. Jahrhundert n.Chr. stamen, ist die Homeromantie wesentlich alter, *allerdings nicht belegt*" [italics mine]. This is less than helpful.

73 For a more detailed discussion of all these sources see Van der Horst, "Sortes: Sacred Books as Instant Oracles in Late Antiquity."

74 See on this topic in general the fine work by Robert Lamberton, *Homer the Theologian* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986).

sphere of divination.[75] In view of the more or less parallel development in status of Homer and of the Bible among Greeks and Jews respectively, it is at least not necessary to assume such an influence. These developments probably took place independently from one another and on parallel lines.[76] But it may be clear how much still remains uncertain in this field.

75 See Pieter van der Horst, "Jewish Self-Definition by Way of Contrast in *Oracula Sibyllina* III 218–47," in idem, ed. *Aspects of Religious Contact and Conflict in the Ancient World* (Utrecht: Utrecht University, 1995), 147–66, reprinted in Van der Horst, *Hellenism – Judaism – Christianity: Essays on Their Interaction*, 2nd ed. (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 93–110.

76 Jewish influence on the Christian use of *sortes biblicae* is not impossible but hard to prove. It should be kept in mind that the Jewish instances derive all of them from Palestinian and Babylonian sources, whereas the Christian material is mostly from the western provinces of the Roman Empire.

CHAPTER 8

The *Sortes Barberinianae* within the Tradition of Oracular Texts

Randall Stewart[1]

Ironically, the fortune-telling book now known as the Sortes Barberinianae both originated from and was ultimately destroyed by its more illustrious progenitor, the Sortes Astrampsychi. The compiler of the Sortes Barberinianae patterned his work, in terms of both structure and content, so closely on the model of the Sortes Astrampsychi that the two texts appear, at first glance, to be nearly identical. It was, however, precisely that remarkable similarity between the two works that led someone to render the Sortes Barberinianae non-functional by filling the holes in a damaged and lacunose copy of it with what appeared to be the equivalent portions of the Sortes Astrampsychi. That botched restoration must have been the deathblow to the Sortes Barberinianae, which had already been debilitated by a succession of scribal gaffes. After the transcriber's unwitting sabotage, only a small percentage of the combinations of questions and lot numbers would have produced an appropriate oracular response, a fact that must have exasperated users of the book – both diviners and petitioners – to the point that they abandoned the text altogether.

The sixteenth-century scribe who copied this lifeless text of the Sortes Barberinianae into a volume now housed in the Vatican Library as Codex Barberinianus graecus 13,[2] undoubtedly did so to preserve a curious relic of a

1 I am extremely grateful to Professors AnneMarie Luijendijk and William E. Klingshirn, both for inviting me to participate in the 2011 Symposium on Sortilege in Late Antiquity, as well as for their thoroughgoing editorial reading of a draft of this chapter. The comments and suggestions they proffered have made this work better. Any errors or infelicities that remain are, of course, ascribable to me alone.

2 This fortune-telling text is on ff. 38r–62v of the smallish codex (149 x 107 mm) that consists of a mere eighty-one folios, but the entire volume is devoted to things oracular and astrological. Its contents include a copy of the Sortes Astrampsychi, a "horologion of the stars and twelve signs of the zodiac," a "horoscope of the planets and signs of the zodiac," the introduction to the *Elementa apotelesmatica* of Paulus Alexandrinus, as well as, on ff. 31r–35r, a work that purports to be "the third book of Pythagoras to King Ptolemy." This text, which is situated between the Sortes Astrampsychi and the Sortes Barberinianae in the codex, offers to the king (and, hence, to all readers), a means for determining the prophet, apostle, or patriarch to whom any given prayer should be made for the best possible result. The determination is

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more superstitious past rather than to obtain, for personal use, a viable means of accessing oracular prognostications. Indeed, perhaps as evidence that this Barberinian text, as well as – most likely – its precursors for some time back, was not completely operational, the book is devoid of instructions for obtaining an oracle, a procedure that is not transparent in any degree whatsoever. The scribe of Codex Barberinianus graecus 13 may have been the last person to reproduce the oracular work, which survives today solely in this manuscript.

1 History of Scholarship on the Sortes Barberinianae

To date, modern scholarship has handled the Sortes Barberinianae as nothing more than an early textual witness to those portions of the Sortes Astrampsychi that it preserves. The primary disincentive to earnest scholarship on the work has been its inherit obscurity and complexity: to write knowledgeably about the text, one must thoroughly understand its structure and arcane workings, an understanding that can be acquired only by comprehensive study of the Sortes Astrampsychi. Herein, however, lies the secondary deterrent to scholarly work on the Sortes Barberinianae: to do this comprehensive study, one must turn to the late Gerald Michael Browne's explication of the Sortes Astrampsychi (1970) and his critical edition of the first ecdosis of that text. However, in the preface of that edition, Browne describes the hopelessly corrupt state of the Sortes Barberinianae,[3] dismisses it as little more than a quarry of early textual nuggets of the Sortes Astrampsychi,[4] and relegates its readings to a secondary apparatus (1983, VII). My own critical edition of the second ecdosis of the Sortes Astrampsychi, although it places the Sortes Barberinianae's readings in the primary apparatus, is similarly dismissive of the work (2001b, X–XI), deeming it important only for its preservation of several decades of answers in the Sortes Astrampsychi that antedate the emendations of Christian interpolators (see below).

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based on the sum generated by tossing a grain onto a circle that is subdivided into numbered units; the sum is then located in a Table of Correspondences (which derives from the Sortes Astrampsychi with only minor variations), and there one finds the name of the appropriate spiritual luminary.

3 *in quo tot confusa et depravata sunt*, "in which a great many parts are jumbled and corrupted."

4 *quod autem iis qui libellum Barberinianum adire solebant maxime displicebat, id editori* [*Sortium Astrampsychi*] *gratius atque acceptius est. nam hic illic in eis decadibus elucent quae in* A *commutata vel depravata sunt*, "The thing that was especially displeasing to those who customarily consulted the Barberinian text is rather pleasant and welcome to the editor of [the Sortes Astrampsychi], for here and there in those decades [of it that are preserved in the Sortes Barberinianae] elements that have been changed or corrupted in A [i.e., a manuscript of the Sortes Astrampsychi] are manifestly clear."

The textual critic of the Sortes Astrampsychi may be forgiven for such a trivializing opinion of the Sortes Barberinianae, but, as this chapter hopes to show, it is an oracular text quite worthy, on its own merits, of academic scrutiny, even if no one has yet begun that examination.[5]

2 The Kinship of the Sortes Barberinianae and the Sortes Astrampsychi

Like a mother and daughter whose physical and behavioral characteristics are so similar that their familial relationship is unmistakable, the Sortes Astrampsychi and the Sortes Barberinianae have an obvious parent-child affiliation. The two oracular works have the same elements: 1) a list of questions that one might ask about one's future; 2) a Table of Correspondences; 3) names of exalted individuals (biblical or ecclesiastical) whom one invokes to guide the oracular process; and 4) answers to the questions arranged in 'decades' of ten responses per group. The two books also function in the same way: the user 1) selects a question of personal interest from the list and notes the number of that query; 2) employs some means of sortition to arrive at a 'lot' number between one and ten; 3) adds the lot number to the question number; 4) finds that sum in the Table of Correspondences, which indicates both the decade in which the user's answer is located as well as the individual who will direct this particular oracular process; and finally 5) looks in the specified decade at the line number corresponding to his lot number to read the answer to his question.

The Sortes Barberinianae is almost certainly the child, rather than the parent, of the Sortes Astrampsychi. That the Sortes Barberinianae is the younger text is argued both by its list of exalted beings, which includes individuals from as late as the fifth century (some four centuries after the probable date of the Sortes Astrampsychi), and by its occasional use of Byzantine lexical items,[6] a variety of diction that is absent from the Sortes Astrampsychi. Furthermore, one is inclined to ascribe primacy to the Sortes Astrampsychi simply because, from our modern vantage point, it was clearly the more esteemed and popular text, the one that would have been more likely to be copied and adapted.

5 Indeed, I am currently preparing a critical edition of the work with commentary.

6 For example, questions 36 and 50 ask about prospects for a ταξίδιον, 'journey' or 'trip,' and the answer at 13.10 predicts that the child will be φιλάσθενον, 'sickly.' Both words came into the Greek lexicon considerably later than the production of the Sortes Astrampsychi. The latter is first attested in Joannes Damascenus' *Quid est homo?* (seventh or eighth century CE), the former in the ninth-century *Oneirokritikon* of Achmet and in various authors of the tenth century (e.g., Digenes Acritas and Constantinus VII Porphyrogenitus) as well as in demonstrably late recensions of the Historia Alexandri Magni (namely, E, F, V, and Φ).

While none of these evidentiary items is completely unassailable, one would have to posit a plurality of assumptions to combat them. For example, one could argue that the Sortes Barberinianae's demonstrably late features, i.e., its Byzantine diction and fifth-century exalted guides, were introduced to the book centuries after its original composition. This argument is not hopelessly implausible, given the fact that, as the textual transmission of the Sortes Astrampsychi demonstrates, a sub-literary text, such as a book of oracles, was susceptible to varieties of redaction that were only rarely exercised on literary works. The Sortes Astrampsychi's list of exalted oracular guides, as one example, went through a series of radical transformations, from the Graeco-Egyptian deities named in P.Lugd.Bat. XXV n. 8 (see below) to the biblical figures listed in the so-called first edition (SA^1), and on to the altogether different list of biblical personages in the second edition (SA^2). In addition, Christian interpolators freely replaced those questions, and their corresponding answers, that they considered iniquitous (such as "Will I be caught as an adulterer?") with more 'dignified' queries (such as "Will I become a monk?").[7] Also, although no papyrus of the Sortes Astrampsychi preserves the work's prefatory material – including authorial ascription and usage instructions – it is certain that the introduction in the medieval manuscripts, with its Christian overtones, can only have been a later addition to the book or, at least, a substantial alteration of the original preface.

Furthermore one could maintain that, even if the Sortes Astrampsychi was copied more times and was more widely disseminated than the Sortes Barberinianae, as the extant evidence argues, this greater popularity would not be incontrovertible proof that the Sortes Astrampsychi was its mother, since the role of dumb luck in the preservation of manuscripts is inestimable. Nonetheless, the simpler and more plausible conclusion is that the Sortes Barberinianae was derived from the Sortes Astrampsychi, its more illustrious ancestor. A careful, comparative examination of the two books' mechanics lends credence to this deduction.

7 For a list and discussion of these interpolations, see Randall Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi* (Leipzig: Teubner, 2001), vol. 2, XIV–XV; Franziska Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi: Problemlösungsstrategien durch Orakel im römischen Ägypten*, ORA 3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 115–20.

3 Construction of the Sortes Barberinianae and the Sortes Astrampsychi

As outlined above, the method for consulting either the Sortes Astrampsychi or the Sortes Barberinianae is quite simple, mechanically speaking, but the clever construction of the books, the construction that, as if by magic, led a user through the more than 1000 responses in the body of the work to the answer to that user's selected question, must have baffled almost everyone who made use of the books, whether oracle seeker or diviner or even redactor.

Underlying the magic, of course, is an ingeniously convoluted structure. Browne (1970), building on the work of J. Rendel Harris (1901), showed that the method of the Sortes Astrampsychi's compiler was as follows:

1) He composed ten answers to each of his ninety-two questions, arranging them in columns of decades, with the first decade containing the ten responses to the first question, the second decade comprising the answers to the second question, and so on.[8]
2) He then 'staggered' the answers by, in effect, moving the second line in the first decade into the second line of the second decade, the third line of the first decade into the third line of the third decade, and so on. By means of this staggering, the compiler ensured that each decade would offer responses, in inverse order, to ten different, but consecutive, questions from the initial list of queries.
3) The previous step created ten additional decades, each with at least one empty line, which had been vacated when its answer was moved to the right. The compiler filled these slots randomly with 'fake' answers, that is, with responses that do, in fact, answer specific questions in the work but cannot be reached by a user with any combination of question and lot numbers.
4) He then composed two decades comprised solely of fake answers.
5) Finally, he 'shuffled' the decades, reordering them so they would no longer be in the same numerical sequence as in the original composition (with the first line of each decade responding to the next question after the question answered by the first line of the previous decade). This shuffling necessitated the Table of Correspondences, which has the effect of showing the original order of the decades.

The first two steps in the composition of the Sortes Barberinianae were identical to those employed in the development of the Sortes Astrampsychi; the compiler wrote his questions (110 in total), authored ten answers to each

8 We do not know, of course, that this compiler was male. Masculine pronouns are employed here and elsewhere in this charpter solely by grammatical convention.

(in 110 decades), and staggered the answers. But then, instead of writing fake answers in the blank lines created by the staggering, he simply 'wrapped' the entire arrangement, as if around a cylinder, so those decades that began with empty lines conjoined with those decades that ended in empty lines.

Then the compiler finished the task by shuffling the order of the decades and producing the Table of Correspondences. The result was a book of fate with 110 questions, 110 decades of answers, and no fake responses – a book that is less complex and, hence, less mysterious than the Sortes Astrampsychi.

One somewhat inelegant consequence of the wrapping in the Sortes Barberinianae is that the conjoined decades must do double duty and, therefore, have to be listed twice in the Table of Correspondences, a necessity that the Sortes Astrampsychi's compiler had obviated by employing fake answers. For example, decade 92 in the Sortes Astrampsychi is unshuffled decade 111. Any user, whose question and lot numbers totaled 111, would locate this number in the left hand column in the Table of Correspondences and would find that he should look in decade 111 for his answer. Only a combination of a question numbered 103 through 101 and a lot number from eight through ten respectively would lead a user to this decade, since its first seven lines contain fake answers. On the other hand, decade 92 in the Sortes Barberinianae serves both as unshuffled decade 8 *and* as unshuffled decade 118. Its first seven lines offer obtainable answers to questions seven through one respectively, and its final three lines, which were filled by the wrapping described above, contain genuine answers to questions 110 through 108 respectively. Accordingly, this decade appears twice in the Table of Correspondences: as the destination decade for users with a question and lot number total of eight as well as for those with a total of 118.

However, the subterfuge achieved by the Sortes Astrampsychi with fake answers and the consequent avoidance of double-duty decades came at the cost of a different sort of inelegance: because of the twelve added decades, the first question had to be numbered twelve, not one. Diviners who allowed their consultants to read the questions in the Sortes Astrampsychi for themselves must have grown tired of inquiries into the whereabouts of questions 1 through 11.

T. C. Skeat, in his argument for the date of the Sortes Astrampsychi, made an observation that is worth considering in this context. Having noted the shared ancestry of the Sortes Astrampsychi and the Latin Sortes Sangallenses, Skeat maintained that the latter was not derived from the former, because no one "producing a Latin manual based on Astrampsychus … would have gone to the trouble of *un*shuffling the groups of answers and thereby destroying one of the

most effective means of producing an air of mystification."[9] Skeat's hypothesis is that, when two oracular texts obviously share ancestry, the less complicated text should be deemed earlier, since the compiler of an oracular book would not adopt an existing work as his model and then simplify its obfuscating construction in his new production.

But what about fake answers? Would someone producing a newer version of the Sortes Astrampsychi go to the trouble of deleting all fake answers (by restructuring the text so every answer could be reached by users) and thereby destroy one of the more effective ways of obfuscating the workings of the book?

To be sure, the fake answers in the Sortes Astrampsychi and even the two decades that contain nothing but fake answers do not befog the mechanics of the text's oracular process in the same dramatic manner as does the shuffled order of the decades. In fact, the very presence of the fake answers is difficult to detect unless one 'disassembles' the book to see how it is structured. The Sortes Astrampsychi's compiler may have employed fake answers not so much to mystify those who would consult the work but rather those who would attempt to reverse engineer it to create a new oracular text. Nonetheless, if the Sortes Barberinianae is derived from the Sortes Astrampsychi, one must explain why its compiler simplified his exemplar by not incorporating fake responses and by restructuring the book so it would function properly without them.

Skeat's logic is plausible, but it does not allow for the possibility that a compiler who fails to understand completely the construction of his *Vorlage* might *unwittingly* simplify his new book. The outlines above, of the steps taken in the compilation of both the Sortes Astrampsychi and the Sortes Barberinianae, imply that each compiler was consciously aware of each step and its end result. The Sortes Astrampsychi's compiler undoubtedly possessed such awareness, while, as we shall see, the Sortes Barberinianae's probably did not.

4 Compilation of the Sortes Barberinianae

If we trace the steps that a compiler setting out to update or rewrite the Sortes Astrampsychi, with all of its mysterious complexity, would be likely to take, we can easily map the route that would have led from the Sortes Astrampsychi – with its ninety-two questions (the first one numbered twelve), 103 decades,

9 Unpublished personal letter to Gerald M. Browne, dated 18 March 1982. Skeat encouraged Browne to publish the arguments of the letter, and Browne, in turn, passed the letter to me with the mandate to include its contents in my work on the Sortes Astrampsychi.

and 110 fake answers – to the Sortes Barberinianae, with 110 questions (the first one bearing the number one), 110 decades, and no fakes. Furthermore we will see that the goal of the Sortes Astrampsychi's original compiler to baffle those who would replicate his work was probably achieved in the case of the Sortes Barberinianae's author, who may not have realized that the structure of his new work was relatively artless compared to that of its much admired predecessor. In fact, as we shall demonstrate below, he may have believed that he had eradicated – ingeniously or accidentally – one of the Sortes Astrampsychi's noisome quirks, namely, that its first question bore the number twelve.[10]

The simplest way to create a new book of fate, based on the Sortes Astrampsychi, would be to replace some or all of its questions and then to search through the decades, looking for answers that respond to the pre-altered form of those questions; one would rewrite these answers to make them consistent with the new queries. Altering or even completely replacing the list of exalted oracular guides and the introductory material would make the book a new production, with only a structural and functional similarity to the Sortes Astrampsychi. However, if one desires to offer more than the Sortes Astrampsychi's ninety-two questions and/or to mask even the structural similarity to it, one must follow a more difficult course, a course that must start from at least a rudimentary understanding of the 'magic' that underlies its functionality. It is this course that the author of the Sortes Barberinianae chose. He would have endeavored to uncover the Sortes Astrampsychi's magic in the most logical manner, by exploring how the question and lot numbers, the Table of Correspondences, and especially the structure of the decades work together to lead an oracle seeker to his response.

Even though the papyri and manuscripts of the Sortes Astrampsychi do not indicate in the decades of answers, as is commonly done in modern editions, to which question each line of the decade responds, it is not difficult to determine this information, since answers almost always repeat the operative words of the questions. For example, question 43, εἰ ἐργαστήριον ἀνοίξω; "Will I open a workshop?" is answered with statements such as οὐκ ἀνοίγεις ἐργαστήριον ἄρτι "You will not open a workshop just yet" (62.2), and ἀνοίγεις ἐργαστήριον ἐξαπίνης, "You will open a workshop with short notice" (100.7). When one writes the question numbers next to the answers in one's copy, one readily sees the pattern: each decade contains answers, in reverse order,

10 What cannot be determined with any degree of certainty, due to the scant internal evidence and the inherent malleability of such sub-literary texts, is the century in which our compiler produced the Sortes Barberinianae. My preliminary conjecture is the sixth or seventh century.

to ten consecutive questions (e.g., decade 29 offers responses, in this order, to questions 93–84). Our compiler undoubtedly employed this methodology to ascertain the identity and function of each decade.

For the time being, let us assume, as seems likely, that our compiler used a manuscript of the Sortes Astrampsychi in which the fake answers had been rewritten so they would both replicate the order of genuine responses and create a loop, with the last genuine response to question 103, in any given decade, being followed by a fake answer to question 12 and the first genuine answer to question 12 being preceded by a fake answer to question 103. This redaction had taken place by the time copies of the so-called second edition were being produced, whereas the unordered sequence of fakes is evident in SA^1 and the papyri.[11] An example of the rewriting and its consequences can be seen in decade 82. In SA^1 this decade contains in its first four lines fake answers to questions 54, 86, 27, and 46 respectively. In SA^2, these lines have been rewritten so they offer fake responses to questions 15, 14, 13, and 12 respectively, a sequence that mirrors the standard ordering of genuine answers. This decade is unshuffled decade 108, as indicated both by the Table of Correspondences and by the presence in the fifth line of a response to question 103 (103 + 5 = 108), but it could also be fully functional as unshuffled decade 16 if the Table directed to it those users whose question and lot numbers totaled sixteen.

Once our compiler had recorded in the margins the question number to which each answer responded, he would have readily observed that 1) the decades in the Sortes Astrampsychi were shuffled (as he may have deduced previously from the presence of the Table of Correspondences); 2) even without the aid of the Table he could identify the original, unshuffled identity of each decade (by merely adding one to the number of the question answered by the decade's first line or by adding ten to the number of the question answered by the last line); and 3) in their unshuffled order, the first decade begins with an answer to the first question, the second decade with a response to the second question, and so on.

When he had arrived at this degree of understanding, our compiler was ready to produce the work that we now call the Sortes Barberinianae. He composed his list of questions, 110 in all, by taking some of them from the Sortes Astrampsychi (see below) as well as by creating additional, new queries. Then

11 SA^1 and SA^2 do not, in fact, preserve two ancient ecdoses of the work; see Randall Stewart, "The Textual Transmission of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*," *Illinois Classical Studies* 20 (1995): 135–47. Instead, SA^1 was produced when someone tried to make functional once again a manuscript that had lost its Table of Correspondences. Nonetheless, it deserves the appellation 'first edition,' because it is syntactically closer to the archetype than SA^2 and it preserves the original arrangement of fake answers.

he wrote ten responses to each question, arranging them in the same staggered fashion that he had observed in the Sortes Astrampsychi. He inadvertently achieved the 'wrapping' described above by continuing to follow his model, a manuscript in which the fake answers in those lines vacated by the original compiler's staggering had been rewritten in the format outlined above. Then he shuffled the decades and created his Table of Correspondences, assigning two different unshuffled numbers to those decades in which a response to question 110 was followed by a response to question 1 or vice versa.

In this scenario, our compiler did not understand the fake answers in the Sortes Astrampsychi. Consequently he did not take the third and fourth steps that were employed in the compilation of it, as outlined above, but only because he did not realize that his predecessor had taken them. He was, perhaps, pleased to find that he could give the number 1 to his first question, even if he did not comprehend why that was possible (and even necessary). However, if he performed a close comparison of his Table of Correspondences with that in the Sortes Astrampsychi, he may have been dismayed that some of his decades were required to do double duty. Or, on the other hand, he might have been pleased that his use of decades was more economical than that of his predecessor.

One cannot, however, completely rule out the possibility, though it is less likely, that our compiler did, in fact, come to understand how the Sortes Astrampsychi employed fake responses both to obfuscate the text and to limit each decade to a single use. In this scenario, happy that he had constructed his oracular work in such a way that he not only used all decades economically but also obviated the need to assign the number twelve to his first question, he purposefully avoided steps three and four in his compilation.

With either scenario – whether the Sortes Barberinianae's compiler recognized the fake answers in his *Vorlage* or not – we have a credible account of its creation, one that rests primarily on only one assumption, namely, that the compiler worked from a manuscript of the Sortes Astrampsychi in which the order of fake answers mirrored that of genuine responses. This account explains why the work lacks the fakes of the Sortes Astrampsychi, its predecessor, and why it is, therefore, somewhat simpler, thus countering a possible objection to this genealogy based on Skeat's line of reasoning.

By contrast, any argument for the opposite theory, that the Sortes Astrampsychi was derived from the Sortes Barberinianae, requires the improbable assumption that the compiler, disdaining the 'double' use of those decades that, as a result of wrapping, contained an answer to question 1 in any line other than the tenth or an answer to question 110 anywhere except in the first line, he rewrote such decades with fake answers, in no particular order,

below the response to question 1, in the one case, or above the answer to question 110, in the other case, and that he then, after composing two additional decades consisting solely of fake responses, renumbered his questions so the first query would have the number twelve. The possible motivation for such alterations is hard to imagine, since the sort of inelegance occasioned by the double use of some decades is much less pronounced than that which arises from the assignment of the number twelve, rather than one, to the first question. The former would be noticed only by individuals who *carefully* scrutinized the Table of Correspondences, while the latter would be obvious to anyone who looked at the beginning of the list of questions.

5 The Components of the Sortes Barberinianae

5.1 *Introductory Material/Instructions*

The text of the Sortes Barberinianae preserved in Codex Barberinianus graecus 13, as noted above, provides no instructions for consulting the oracular work, nor does it offer any prefatory matter beyond the ascription Ἀστραμψύχου ποίημα τοῦ φιλοσόφου, "A work of Astrampsychus, the philosopher," and the Christian prayer that a petitioner is to utter. This prayer is identical to the one found in the introductory matter in six of the twelve manuscripts of SA^2.[12]

5.2 *Questions*

An oracular text, to be truly useful, must be able to address, at the very least, the most common concerns of the people to whom it purports to be a legitimate means of sortilege. The corollary to this reality is that now, many centuries later, we can examine the questions in a book of oracles to get a glimpse of daily life at the time of the text's compilation. What we find in the Sortes Astrampsychi, the Sortes Barberinianae, the additional decades of answers in P.Oxy. 4581, and in the Latin Sortes Sangallenses[13] are scores of questions about money, inheritance, romance, health, prosperity, business prospects, and chances for political office.[14]

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12 These codices are ANPRSV. Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. 2, x–xi.

13 Editio princeps: Hermann Winnefeld, *Sortes Sangallenses: Adjecta sunt alearum oracula ex codice Monacensi primum edita* (Bonn 1887). A new edition is by Alban Dold, *Die Orakelsprüche im St. Galler Palimsestcodex 908* (*die sogenannten Sortes Sangallenses*). SÖAW.PH 225. 4 (Vienna, 1948).

14 For discussions of the nature of these questions, see Karl Strobel, "Soziale Wirklichkeit und irrationales Weltverstehen in der Kaiserzeit I, *Sortes Astrampsychi und Sortes Sangallenses*," *Laverna* 3 (1992): 134–38; William E Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in

The questions in the Sortes Astrampsychi are androcentric. While most of them could be posed by either a male or female oracle seeker (e.g., "Is the traveler alive?"), many could reasonably be asked only by a male (e.g., "Will my wife miscarry?"). None are specifically designed for a female inquirer; i.e., the Sortes Astrampsychi offers no queries such as "Will my husband remain with me?" or "Will I marry my boyfriend?" both of which are offered in male-oriented versions. The nature of the Sortes Barberinianae's questions is similar: seventy-three queries are not gender-specific, fourteen would be posed by males alone, and twenty-three are somewhat ambiguous in that, depending on the time period and local culture, they might be questions that a woman could ask (e.g., εἰ ἀνοίγω ἐργαστήριον; "Will I open a workshop?" [60]). None would be germane only to women.

Franziska Naether has cogently argued that women were neither excluded from consulting the Sortes Astrampsychi nor were limited to those questions that lack a male orientation, as a diviner could reword most androcentric queries to suit a female inquirer (2010, 94–96).[15] This plausible scenario notwithstanding, the want of even a single question specifically designed for female consultants is jarring, at least from a modern perspective. Where are the kinds of questions that a woman might ask about, say, her prospects for joining a female-only religious order or her ability to bear children?

Sixty of the 110 questions in the Sortes Barberinianae are identical, or very similar, to questions in the Sortes Astrampsychi. The parent-child relationship of the two texts is responsible for much of this overlap, but no compiler would need a model for questions that are *de rigueur* in an oracular text, such as εἰ εὐτυχής εἰμι; "Will I be successful?" (Sortes Barberinianae, question 8; Sortes Astrampsychi, question 19), and εἰ κληρονομῶ τὸν πατέρα; "Will I inherit from my father?" (Sortes Barberinianae, question 12; Sortes Astrampsychi, question 33).

Most of the questions in the Sortes Barberinianae that do not have parallels in the Sortes Astrampsychi are additional queries about concerns that are amply addressed in both texts – business prospects, romance, family, interpersonal relationships, and general well-being – but a few of these unparalleled queries may have been intended to fill what the Sortes Barberinianae's compiler saw as

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Late Roman Gaul: the *Sortes Sangallenses*," in *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter T. Struck (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 111–17; and Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 218–78, 285.

15 For example, a female consultant of SA² might select question 55, "Will I obtain the woman (wife) I desire?", but both she and the oracle monger would understand that in her case the question was "Will I obtain the man (husband) I desire?" In similar fashion, the male-oriented answer on which this user landed would be changed 'on the fly' to suit its female recipient.

deficiencies in the Sortes Astrampsychi. For example, the latter has no specific questions that a petitioner could ask to learn about his prospects in farming, battle, or flight. The compiler of the Sortes Barberinianae, either from personal experience or from second-hand reports, may have known that a notable number of the Sortes Astrampsychi's consultants were disappointed not to find such questions at their disposal.

Let us look at some of the Sortes Barberinianae's questions that could be of this variety. Question 51 is εἰ νικῶ τὸν πόλεμον; "Will I win the battle?" and question 102 reads εἰ σώζομαι ἐν τῷ πολέμῳ; "Will I survive the battle?" The word πόλεμος, 'battle' or 'war,' is completely absent from the Sortes Astrampsychi. While it does give some attention to military matters – question 14 asks "Will I serve in the army?" and question 65 reads "Will I be a general?" – a consultant who wished to inquire about his fate on the battlefield or his prospects for victory had to settle for a more generic inquiry, such as question 19, "Will I be fortunate?"

Two answers in the added decades of answers in P.Oxy. 4581 suggest the question "Will it be to my advantage to serve in the army?" (probably εἰ συμφέρει μοι στρατεύσασθαι;), but, once again, the question is not specifically about prospects in battle.

Since the term πόλεμος, just as its English translations 'battle' and 'war,' can denote any struggle or difficulty, questions 51 and 102 in the Sortes Barberinianae would have been serviceable even to civilians, but there are no grounds for arguing that these questions were not specifically designed for soldiers and those who were subject to the ravages of martial conflicts. These pinpoint queries must have been quite popular with men who participated in warfare and, perhaps, in the case of question 102, with women and noncombatants whose towns were in danger of being overrun by an enemy force.

The surviving manuscript of the Sortes Sangallenses preserves two sets of answers to questions that would have been of interest to individuals concerned about their fate in war. One of the sets includes these responses: *non poteris modo in expeditionem ire. cave*, "You will not be able to go on the campaign just now. Beware" (3.1); *vade in expeditionem feliciter. victor venies*, "Go on the campaign to your good fortune. You will return victoriously." (4.2); *non tibi expedit in expeditionem ire, ne captus interficiaris*, "It is not advantageous for you to go on the campaign, since you would be captured and killed" (5.3); *vade feliciter in expeditionem, quia tua est victoria*, "Go on the campaign to your good fortune, since the victory will be yours" (6.4); *moneo te, ne vadas ad expeditionem*, "I warn you not to go on the campaign" (7.5); *vade feliciter in expeditionem et victor venis cum lucris tuis*, "Go on the campaign to your good fortune, and you will return victoriously with your spoils" (8.6); *festina*

ad expeditionem, quia in victoria felicissimus eris, "Hurry to the campaign, since you will be extremely fortunate in the victory" (9.7).

The missing question to which these responses pertain almost certainly included the word *expeditio* and perhaps an adverb or adverbial expression designed to tease out information about the chances for success on that campaign. This question may have been *si in expeditionem feliciter vado*, "Will I go on the campaign to my good fortune?".

While metaphorical interpretations of *expeditio* would have allowed users to select this query for non-military matters, the term commonly denoted a military campaign against an enemy. Hence the question is akin to the Sortes Barberinianae 51, εἰ νικῶ τὸν πόλεμον; "Will I win the battle?" but not so similar to it that one would argue for a shared ancestry.

The other set of answers in the Sortes Sangallenses that suggests a question susceptible of a military application includes these responses: *non poteris modo vincere*, "You will not be able to be victorious just yet" (20.4); *vinces et in plenius gaudebis*, "You will be victorious, and you will rejoice greatly" (21.5); *vinces sed cum magno labore*, "You will be victorious but with great effort" (22.6); *vinces quidem illum, quem vis, sed tarde*, "You will indeed be victorious over that man, whom you wish [to defeat] but after a time" (23.7); *ad pactum venies, nam non vinces*, "You will resort to a treaty, for you will not be victorious" (24.8).

The question to which these lines respond was probably something as simple as *si vincam*, "Will I be victorious?". While there is no specific reference to war in this query or its answers, the question must have been selected often by those about to engage in military contests, for whom victory, both personal and collective, was a concern.

The Sortes Barberinianae's question 97, εἰ σώζομαι φυγών; "Will I be safe if I flee?" does not have a direct parallel in the Sortes Astrampsychi or in the added decades in P.Oxy. 4581. Although there are various situations in which a petitioner might take to flight, this question most readily suggests a slave inquiring about the prospects for a successful escape. Although the Sortes Astrampsychi does not have any questions that a petitioner could ask about his or her own flight, it does have two questions about someone else's flight, namely, εἰ εὑρίσκω τὸν φυγόντα; "Will I find the fugitive?" (36), and εἰ λανθάνει μου ὁ δρασμός; "Will the fugitive escape my detection?" (89). In addition, the Sortes Astrampsychi contains a query that would be selected by a slave hoping for manumission: εἰ ἐλευθεροῦμαι τῆς δουλείας; "Will I be freed from slavery?" (32).

Users of the Sortes Sangallenses could select from a variety of questions dealing with flight. Though none of these queries is a direct parallel to the Sortes Barberinianae's question 97, three of them address the anxiety of a slave who is contemplating flight. Among the answers to these questions are *et si*

fugeris, prenderis, "Although you will flee, you will be caught" (31.1); *fugi. noli hic esse*, "Flee. Do not stay here" (31.2); *non fuges. noli vereri*, "You will not flee. Do not fear" (31.3); *si fugeris, celabitur fuga tua*, "If you flee, your flight will be concealed" (32.2); *facile evades in fuga*, "You will easily escape in your flight" (32.3); *fugere cogitas, sed reverteris*, "You will consider fleeing, but you will turn back" (32.4); *non celabitur fuga tua*, "Your flight will not be concealed" (33.3); *fugire tibi non est datum*, "It is not granted to you to flee" (33.4); *periclitaveris in fuga*, "You will be exposed to peril in your flight" (34.4); *non facis ullo loco*, "You will not betake yourself anywhere" (34.5); *fugis. necesse est et iterum reverteris*, "You will flee. It is necessary and you will return again" (34.6); *si fugeris, evadis pressura*, "If you flee, you will escape oppression" (35.5); *fugere tibi non expedit*, "It is not advantageous for you to flee" (35.6); *fugis sed non modo*, "You will flee but not just yet" (35.7).

The Sortes Sangallenses also offers four questions for masters who want to know if they will recover a runaway slave. Answers to these questions include *quidem fugire vult, seu in itinere capietur*, "He does indeed want to flee, and he will be caught on his journey" (33.1); *non potest latere, qui fugivit. aut invenietur, aut sive revertitur, sed tarde*, "The one who has fled will not be able to hide. He will either be found or he will return, but after a time" (35.2); *vide quid agas, quia, si fugerit, non eum invenies*, "Consider what you should do, since you will not find him, if he flees" (35.3); *si fugerit, non invenietur. custodi eum*, "If he flees, he will not be found. Put him under guard" (37.8); *sollicitatus est, qui fugit. decipitur ab eo et sic invenietur cum detrimento et lite. nam mutavit regionem*, "The one who fled has been stirred up. He will be ensnared because of that, and in this way he will be recovered with a loss and a legal claim, for he has moved elsewhere" (38.7).

Question 100 in the Sortes Barberinianae is εἰ σπείρω καὶ ἐπιτύχω; "Will I sow and be prosperous?". The word σπείρω, like πόλεμος in questions 51 and 102, can have a metaphorical sense: in addition to its basic, agrarian meaning 'to sow *seeds*,' it can also mean 'to beget *or* sire *children*.' The nine preserved answers are sufficiently ambiguous, perhaps by design, that one cannot be certain whether the verb in the Sortes Barberinianae describes planting a crop or fathering children, or perhaps even some other act of engendering. But although many petitioners may have selected this question when they hoped to learn about their prospects for some endeavor other than agriculture, the compiler's choice of σπείρω as the query's operative verb is probably best seen as recognition of a need to address the concerns of consultants with agrarian interests.

The Sortes Astrampsychi completely ignores farmers' concerns, offering not a single question about sowing, reaping, or the fecundity of fields. However,

users of both the Sortes Sangallenses and the text preserved by P.Oxy. 4581 could ask about their agricultural prospects. Two answers in P.Oxy. 4581's added decades respond to a question that must have read εἰ εὐκαρπήσει τὸ χωρίον; "Will my field produce well?", while a set of answers in the Sortes Sangallenses addresses a query about the nature of the season's crop: *hunc annum bonos fructus habebis et multum gaudebis*, "You will have good crops this year, and you will rejoice greatly" (1.8); *hunc annu<m> fructi miserrimi sunt; cave ne inopiam patiaris*, "The crops this year will be very paltry; take care that you do not suffer want" (2.9); *hoc anno fructus bonus tibi significatur*, "A good crop is prognosticated for you in this year" (3.10); *hunc annum fructi rari nascuntur et tempus laboriosum significat<ur>*, "Sparse crops will grow this year, and a rough time is prognosticated" (4.11); *hunc annum boni fructi sunt et multum gaudebis*, "The crops this year will be good, and you will rejoice greatly" (5.12).

5.3 *Table of Correspondences*

The Sortes Barberinianae's Table of Correspondences has the same function and appearance as that in the Sortes Astrampsychi, but it is riddled with errors. Only about 70% of the correspondences are correct, which would have been a persistent annoyance to those who tried to use the book for sortilege. The origin of the corruption is not clear, but such a table, with its long lists of alphabetic numerals – most appearing quite similar to those around them – offered many dangers for scribes who were less than punctilious in their work.

5.4 *List of Oracular Guides*

In the medieval manuscripts of both SA[1] and SA[2], the Table of Correspondences indicates not only the decade in which the oracle seeker will find a response but also the individual to whom the seeker's question should be put. For example, someone using SA[2] whose question and lot number total twenty-three would find in the Table of Correspondences that his answer is in decade 24 and that he should direct his question to Ariel (Ἀριήλ). In the heading to decade 24, that user will see the name Ariel along with the etymological interpretation 'strong lion' (λέων ἰσχυρός).

The system of names, also with interpretations, in SA[1] serves precisely the same function as that in SA[2], but the two lists, despite sharing fifteen names, are independent of one another. For no decade is the same oracular guide named in both editions, and SA[1] does not provide etymological interpretations of the names of its oracular guides.

P.Lugd. Bat. XXV n. 8 as well as P.Berol. 21341 and 21358, all from the third century, attest that the biblical figures in the manuscripts replace an

earlier pagan system that was a feature of at least some copies of the Sortes Astrampsychi.[16]

Onomastica of biblical names with etymological explanations (which are sometimes dubious) were popular in the late antique and early medieval eras.[17] Inasmuch as all of the names and their interpretations in both editions of the Sortes Astrampsychi find parallels in these early onomastica, it is safe to conclude that they were drawn from name lists that were already in circulation and were not generated specifically for it.

The system of names in the Sortes Barberinianae was not derived from that of either edition of the Sortes Astrampsychi, although it shares many names with both, especially with SA[1]. With that edition the Sortes Barberinianae shares fifty-six names. With SA[2] it has twenty-three names in common. In only one instance, however, does a name that the Sortes Barberinianae shares with the Sortes Astrampsychi occur in the same decade in both texts.[18] This single concurrence is, no doubt, a coincidence and not an instance of borrowing. Furthermore the list in the Sortes Barberinianae does not provide etymological interpretations, and at least eleven of the names are non-biblical, whereas all of the oracular guides in both editions of the Sortes Astrampsychi are biblical figures and all of them are accompanied by the name's meaning.

The non-biblical figures in the Sortes Barberinianae, with their probable identifications, are as follows:

Athanasius	St. Athanasius of Alexandria (c. 296–373)
Basilios	Basil of Caesarea (330–379)
Cyril	either Patriarch of Alexandria (c. 367–444) or of Jerusalem (c. 313–386)
Epiphanius	Bishop of Salamis, Cyprus (367–402)

16 The evidence is ambiguous. P.Lugd. Bat. XXV n. 8, which preserves a portion of the Table of Correspondences (and is the only extant papyrus that does), shows that the copy of which it is a survivor offered Greek and Egyptian deities as oracular guides. P.Berol. 21341 and 21358 have the name of a Greek deity, without etymological interpretation, at the head of each decade. None of the other papyri (all of which preserve portions of the questions or decades only) show the presence of supernatural guides, but it is possible that in some or even all of these copies, the guides were listed solely in the Table of Correspondences.

17 For modern collections of such onomastica, see Paul de Lagarde, *Onomastica Sacra* (Göttingen: Rente, 1887) and Franz Wutz, *Untersuchungen zum Liber Interpretationis Nominum Hebraicorum des Heiligen Hieronymus*, 2 vols. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1914).

18 Gothoniel is the oracular guide for the eighty-first decade in both the Sortes Barberinianae and the second edition of the Sortes Astrampsychi. The name is Greek for Othniel, who is mentioned in Josh 15:17 and Judg 1:13.

Gregory	Gregory of Nazianzus (c. 329–390), archbishop of Constantinople
Hippolytus	Christian theologian in Rome (170–235)
Josephus	Jewish historian (c. 37–100)[19]
Lebdios	unknown
Leo	Pope Leo I the Great (c. 391–461)
Proclus	Archbishop of Constantinople (d. 446 or 447)
Silvester	Pope (314–335)

5.5 *Decades of Answers*

At some point in the transmission of the Sortes Barberinianae, someone tried to restore lost or damaged portions of the text by simply copying, in most places, what he thought were the relevant passages from the Sortes Astrampsychi. For example, decade 90 in the Sortes Barberinianae is the same as the Sortes Astrampsychi's decade 90 with only slight variant readings, and Sortes Barberinianae's decade 93 is a copy of the ninety-third decade in the Sortes Astrampsychi, once again with slight variations.[20] This restorer was naive, however, because, although he copied, in most instances, answers with decade and line numbers corresponding to the line and decade numbers of the portions that required restoration, the two books are sufficiently discrepant that their parts are not interchangeable. The Sortes Barberinianae's decade 90, for example, needs a set of answers that is quite different from the set that functions perfectly in the Sortes Astrampsychi's decade 90.

The lines contaminated by this restoration are 82.5–10, 83.3–6, 84.1, 88–94, 96.1–2. That the contamination is confined to a relatively small portion of the manuscript means that the loss or damage, affecting only fifteen of the 110 decades, was not extensive. That decades 88–94 apparently had to be replaced in their entirety (a total of seventy lines) might suggest heavy damage to, or the loss of, two consecutively numbered pages; but the absence of any

19 William Klingshirn has astutely pointed out to me that if this Josephus is the Jewish historian, he would be the only Jewish figure in this list of non-biblical guides (depending on the identification of Lebdios). Klingshirn suggests, as a possible alternative, the Christian Josephus, to whom is ascribed a late fourth – or early fifth-century biblical miscellany known as the *Hypomnestikon*; Glen W. Menzies and Robert M. Grant, *Joseph's Bible Notes* (*Hypomnestikon*) SBLTT 41 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1996). The suggestion is attractive because, as Klingshirn notes, more than one-fourth of the *Hypomnestikon* deals with the foretellings and miracles of biblical prophets, while another chapter focuses exclusively on pagan forms of divination.

20 Consequently the readings of the Sortes Barberinianae are cited, in the appropriate decades, in the apparatus critici of both Browne's (1983) and Stewart's (2001b) editions of the Sortes Astrampsychi.

contamination in decades 85–87, which immediately precede this section, and in 95, which immediately follows it, coupled with the contamination in the more remote 82.5–10, 83.3–6, 84.1, and 96.1–2, makes it very difficult, if not impossible, to conjecture the dimensions of a manuscript that could suffer this pattern of loss or damage.

Somewhat surprisingly, the answers copied from the Sortes Astrampsychi tend to align more closely with the readings of SA^1 than with those found in the manuscripts of SA^2, and we can be virtually certain that decade 93 was copied from the first, rather than from the second, edition. In the Sortes Astrampsychi this decade is unshuffled decade 18, which makes its last four responses fake answers, since they are inaccessible by any combination of lot and question numbers. As noted above, fake answers in SA^1 occur in no particular order, while those in SA^2 have been rewritten to mirror the sequential ordering of genuine responses. Consequently, in SA^2 the last four lines of decade 93 contain answers to questions 103–100 respectively, whereas in SA^1 these lines offer responses, in this order, to questions 36, 29, 74, and 80. It is this sequence of answers that was copied into the Sortes Barberinianae.

That SA^1 was the restorer's source does not invalidate the assumption that the Sortes Barberinianae was originally patterned after a manuscript in which the fake answers had been ordered sequentially, which is a feature of SA^2. It simply means that the restorations were made from an 'early' manuscript, that is, from one with readings that were more faithful to the archetype than those of the manuscript from which the Sortes Barberinianae had been created.

Three factors suggest that this loss and/or damage described above happened over time rather than in a single event, and that the attempted restoration similarly occurred in stages. The first of these factors is an anomaly in the case of decade 91. For this decade the restorer copied decade 21 of the Sortes Astrampsychi, although his methodology should have required the copying of decade 91. Neither decade, of course, is workable in this position in the Sortes Barberinianae, but how could one mistake decade 21 for 91?

While the Greek alphabetic symbol for the number 91 (*koppa alpha*, ϘΑ) and that for the number 21 (*kappa alpha*, ΚΑ) do not share a similar appearance, they are nearly homophones of one another. Consequently, it is probable that an aural error caused this anomaly in the restoration. We can imagine two people working in tandem, one as reciter and one as scribe, to restore their defective copy of the Sortes Barberinianae by copying decades from the Sortes Astrampsychi. When the scribe comes to the point in his text where he thinks he needs decade 91 from the text of Astrampsychus, he requests from his reciter decade *koppa alpha*. The reciter, understanding *kappa alpha*, reads the Sortes Astrampsychi's twenty-first decade. But this same error did not occur in the

copying of decades 90, 92, 93, 94, and 96.1–2, which suggests that these decades were not restored at the same time that decade 91 was copied.

The second factor involves decade 92, for which the restorer copied decade 100 from the Sortes Astrampsychi rather than decade 92. The etiology of this 'mistake' is difficult, if not impossible, to explain. Perhaps something along the following lines occurred: in some hands the letter *koppa* and the letter *rho*, which is the alphabetic symbol for 100, have a similar appearance, so perhaps a visual error caused the restorer to search in his exemplar for the decade numbered PB (102) rather than ϘB (92). However, if his exemplar were a witness with the somewhat corrupt structure of SA[1], he would have been surprised to find in it only 100 decades. Uncertain how to proceed, he may have opted simply to copy decade 100. The original misidentification of PB for ϘB is a mistake that would be made only by someone who had not just recently made the correct identification of the Sortes Astrampsychi's decade 90 and, immediately thereafter, decades 93 and 94.

The etiology of the third factor is also difficult to explain. Decade 88 in the Sortes Barberinianae is unshuffled 42, meaning that it should contain answers, in inverse order, to questions 41–32. Its responses, however, are *sui generis* and, hence, of unknown origin. Eight of the answers cannot be construed as responses to any question in the Sortes Barberinianae or the Sortes Astrampsychi,[21] and the remaining two, since they respond to questions that one might find in any oracular text, need not have been taken from it or from elsewhere in the Sortes Barberinianae.[22] Furthermore, the content of the decade is in no way reminiscent of any of the answers in the unique decades found in P.Oxy. 4581 or the answers in the Sortes Sangallenses.

Regardless of the origin of the answers in decade 88, it is unlikely that one individual restoring, at one sitting or at several sittings within a short period of time, all of the damaged or lost portions listed above would draw on the Sortes Astrampsychi as his source for all of the restorations except for this decade.[23]

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21 The second answer, for example, is ἔρχεται φανερούμενος, "He will be made manifest," which pertains to no question in either work. Similarly unique is the seventh answer, which reads ἀντίληψίς σε ἐπέλθῃ, "A claim will come against you."

22 The wording of the question to which the first line responds was probably εἰ τὸ ἀπολόμενον εὑρίσκεται; "Will the lost item be found?" while the question answered by the sixth line was probably εἰ ἐπιτυχῶ καὶ εὐημερῶ; "Will I be fortunate and thrive?".

23 Worthy of note in this context is that the answers in decade 88 and in the unique decades in P.Oxy. 4581, which were added to the end of a witness of the Sortes Astrampsychi, attest that other Greek oracular texts circulated in antiquity beyond those preserved in the received texts of it and the Sortes Barberinianae.

5.6 *Individual Answers*

One of the many factors that gave the Sortes Astrampsychi widespread appeal, both in antiquity and well into the Middle Ages, may have been its slightly disproportionate balance of 'positive' to 'negative' responses, that is, the number of responses that would have been pleasing to users versus the number of answers that would have been something other than what the inquirer hoped to hear.[24] The ratio[25] is important: if too many responses are positive, a high percentage of users will walk away happy with the answers they receive, but, within a short period of time, a substantial number of them, having learned that the oracular responses they heard were erroneously optimistic, will no longer deem the work credible and will not be likely to consult it again. On the other hand, if the work is tilted heavily in favor of negative responses, disheartened users will soon shun it as a gloomy 'Cassandra.'

An examination of the conjectural archetype of the Sortes Astrampsychi, which offers for each question and each answer the preserved reading that has the strongest claim to be what the original compiler wrote, allows one to categorize some 506 of its 920 genuine answers as 'positive' (47%), and about 385 as 'negative' (42%).[26] Such tabulations, however, must be viewed with caution, because only the slightest degree of scribal carelessness or presumption could have transformed any number of 'yes' answers to 'no' responses or vice versa: the simple addition or deletion of οὐ(κ or χ) changes the nature of a response entirely.

The corrupt nature of the Sortes Barberinianae[27] provides insufficient data for any viable conclusion about its percentages of positive and negative answers, but the text also appears to have a slight preponderance of positive responses.

If textual uncertainty makes caution necessary in any tabulation of the respective percentages of 'yes' and 'no' responses in a set of more than 920 answers, that same uncertainty renders impossible almost any deduction

24 This is a more efficacious discrimination than simply calling all 'yes' answers positive and all 'no' responses negative, since there are some questions, such as "Will I be harmed in the business affair?" (31), to which a 'no' answer is desired by the consultant.

25 See David Ratzan's contribution in this volume.

26 Of the remaining twenty-nine answers, three could be understood as neutral, two are irrecoverable due to corruption in the transmission of the text, and twenty-four are of uncertain desirability (because they respond, without positive or negative overtones, to neutral queries, such as "Will I remain where I'm going?" (73).

27 In addition to the contamination that resulted from the restoration efforts described above, many other decades and many lines within decades are corrupt and do not provide the responses required by the structure of the book.

about late antique cultural realia based on the balance of favorable and unfavorable answers among the ten genuine responses to any given question.[28] An admonitory illustration of this point is to be found in the responses to question 42 in the Sortes Astrampsychi, which reads, "Will I recover from the illness?" In SA^2 this query has seven positive and three negative responses. Does this ratio constitute evidence for a 70% recovery rate from illness in the areas where the Sortes Astrampsychi was used in late antiquity – at least for those healthy enough to get themselves to the oracle monger's shop?

The textual variants in SA^1 make such conclusions questionable. In that witness, the nine surviving responses to this question are negative.[29] The missing response at 31.4, lost to the abrasion that makes 30.1 to 31.5 illegible in the sole surviving manuscript, occupies a slot where the second edition has a positive answer to the question, which makes it likely (though far from certain) that this response was also positive in the first edition. Obviously fallacious is the conclusion that, in the time period and geographical areas in which SA^1 circulated, at least 90% of sick people who went to oracle mongers survived their illness, while only 70% of sick individuals who consulted SA^2 recovered. That only slight differences in wording can result in a 20% difference in the percentages of positive and negative answers undermines considerably any deductions about the late antique world made from the answers in the fluid text of a book of fate.

Several sets of responses in the Sortes Barberinianae tempt one to make such unwise deductions. For example, the answers to question 24, "Will I be saved from the illness?" suggest that 50% of those who select this query are going to perish as a result of their sickness. Question 30 asks about the viability of a newborn child; from its answers one might think that only 40% of those children about whom the inquirers asked were destined to lead healthy lives. Without much additional evidence from other ancient sources, one should refrain from viewing these percentages as reliable.

28 Jerry Toner, for example, takes the percentages of positive and negative answers to a number of different questions in the Sortes Astrampsychi as solid evidence for the nature of everyday life in ancient Rome (*Popular Culture in Ancient Rome* [Malden, MA: Polity, 2009], 46–52). Mary Beard rejects at least some of the conclusions that Toner draws from this evidence, but she does not point out that the vicissitudes of textual transmission make the evidence unreliable (*Confronting the Classics: Traditions, Adventures, and Innovations* [New York: W. W. Norton, 2013], 187–88).

29 At 41.9 and 99.2, SA^1 offers negative responses where SA^2 has positive answers.

6 Future Scholarship on the Sortes Barberinianae

As noted above, modern scholarship has, for the most part, undervalued the Sortes Barberinianae, treating it in much the same way that a paleo-entymologist views a chunk of amber that encloses a now-extinct variety of insect, important only for the vestige of the past that it preserves. However, just as amber can be treasured and employed for its own gemstone-like qualities, whether it conserves some remnant of a bygone past or not, the Sortes Barberinianae fully deserves investigation as a significant component in the tradition of oracular texts and as an additional witness to the concerns of individuals in late antiquity.

CHAPTER 9

Oxyrhynchus and Oracles in Late Antiquity

Alexander Kocar[1]

"O my Lord God Almighty and Saint Philoxenus my patron, I beseech you by the great name of the Lord God, if it is your will and you are helping me to take the banking-business, I beseech you to bid me learn this, and speak." These sentences were penned on a small piece of papyrus found at Oxyrhynchus, published as P.Harr. I 54. On the basis of this manuscript, and its "twin," P.Oxy. XVI 1926, Herbert Youtie demonstrated the presence of lot oracles at the shrine of Philoxenus in Oxyrhynchus.[2] These two nearly identically worded manuscripts from the same hand provide evidence for the divinatory practice in which the petitioner would write two lots, one with a positive response and the other negative, and submit both to the shrine. This chapter adds another dimension to the divinatory rites practiced at the shrine to Philoxenus by arguing that oracular codices – consulted alongside and mediated by a ritual expert – were likely in use at the shrine as well.

To this end, this chapter situates two previously unpublished miniature manuscripts among the divinatory practices of the late antique Egyptian city of Oxyrhynchus.[3] I provide a translation of two fragmentary Coptic miniature oracular codices uncovered during the sixth season of excavations at Oxyrhynchus, inv. 68 6B.24/F(1–3)a and 67 6B.15/F(1–5)a, that I am editing for the Egypt Exploration Society's publication series, *The Oxyrhynchus*

1 I wish to express my gratitude to AnneMarie Luijendijk and Bill Klingshirn for inviting me to participate in the conference on *sortes*. I thank AnneMarie for her continual guidance on all things sortilege. I am grateful to Dirk Obbink who gave me access to the Coptic texts discussed in this chapter and to Nikolaos Gonis for his support and suggestions for improvement. Finally, I want to thank Lance Jenott for his helpful comments and criticisms on an earlier draft of this paper.

2 Herbert C. Youtie, "Questions to a Christian Oracle," *ZPE* 18 (1975): 253–57. P.Oxy. XVI 1926 reads in translation: "O my Lord God Almighty and St. Philoxenus my patron, I beseech you by the great name of the Lord God, if it is not your will that I speak either about the bank or about the weighing-office, to bid me learn this, in order that I may not speak."

3 For a good general introduction to Oxyrhynchus and the excavations of Grenfell and Hunt, see Peter Parsons, *City of the Sharp-Nosed Fish: Greek Papyri Beneath the Egyptian Sand Reveal a Long-Lost World* (London: Phoenix, 2007) and the collected essays in *Oxyrhynchus: A City and Its Texts*, ed. A. K. Bowman et al. (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2007).

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Papyri.[4] For convenience, I refer to these two manuscripts as fragment 1 and fragment 2 respectively.[5] I consider by whom and in what social context these miniature oracular texts were likely produced. In particular, I examine the possible affiliation between these two *sortes* fragments and divinatory practices conducted at regional saint shrines in Egypt. And finally, I argue that fragments 1 and 2 were most likely affiliated with the shrine to Saint Philoxenus in Oxyrhynchus and thereby provide additional evidence of the expanding importance and authority of these shrines in the fifth-century and beyond.[6]

1 Text and Translation[7]

Both fragments are from miniature codices, with fragment 1 made of papyrus and fragment 2 of parchment. In E. G. Turner's typological survey of papyrus and parchment codices, he defined a miniature codex by its most conspicuous trait, its size. According to Turner, codices are miniature, whether they are parchment or papyrus, if they measure less than 10 cm in width.[8] Our two manuscripts fall into this category, with fragment 1 measuring 8 cm wide by 7.7 cm and fragment 2 measuring 6 cm wide by 7 cm.

Expanding on Turner's analysis, and concentrating in particular on Coptic miniature codices, Malcolm Choat categorized fifty-six existing manuscripts according to six groupings: 1) sacred texts, 2) prayer/ritual, 3) liturgy, 4) handbooks, 5) education, and 6) other literature.[9] AnneMarie Luijendijk, building on the groupings outlined by Choat, has suggested making another

4 I am very grateful to the General Editors of the Oxyrhynchus Papyri, Amin Benaissa, Nikolaos Gonis, and Peter Parsons, for their generous permission to discuss these texts here in advance of their publication in the Oxyrhynchus Papyri series.

5 Until now, the publication and study of Coptic materials found at Oxyrhynchus have been sporadic. The magnitude of this oversight is compounded by the wealth of Coptic sources that survive from Oxyrhynchus. After cataloguing the sheer volume of Coptic texts, Sarah Clackson encouraged future study by pointing out that there are likely 400 or more literary and documentary Coptic texts from this site that have yet to be published. Clackson, "Coptic Oxyrhynchus," in Bowman, *Oxyrhynchus*, 332–41, esp. 333.

6 See AnneMarie Luijendijk's contribution in this volume, and Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles? The Gospel of the Lots of Mary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014).

7 For a critical edition as well as palaeographical and codicological description of these two pieces, please see P.Oxy. (forthcoming).

8 E. G. Turner, *The Typology of the Early Codex* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania, 1977), 25.

9 Malcolm Choat, "Miniature Codices in Coptic," unpublished handout circulated at the Society of Biblical Literature in 2007. I give my sincere thanks to Malcolm Choat for sharing his handout with me.

cluster of miniature codices, in both Greek and Coptic, organized around the genre of divinatory literature.[10] In light of Choat and Luijendijk's work, we can add fragments 1 and 2 to a sub-group of divinatory miniature codices that are in Coptic only.[11] In addition to fragments 1 and 2, the members of this cluster of Coptic, divinatory miniature manuscripts are the Gospel of the Lots of Mary in the Sackler Library of Harvard and the oracular fragments from Antinoë published by Papini.[12]

Fragment 1 (with the fibers)

	[ⲛⲉⲕⲭⲁ]ϫⲉ ⸏ⲛ̄ⲥⲉ⸍ ⲉⲩⲡⲟⲧⲁ	[Your enemies] will be made
	ϫⲉ ⲛⲁⲕ [ⲙ̄]	subordinate to you
	ⲡⲉⲓⲕⲉⲥ[ⲟⲡ]	once more.
	ⲕⲟⲩⲟϫ [ⲙ̄]	You are saved
5	ⲡⲉⲓⲕⲉⲥⲟ̣ⲡ	once more
	ⲉⲁⲃⲟⲗ ⲙ̄ⲡⲉ	from
	ⲑⲟⲟⲩ ⲛⲓⲙ	every evil.
	>>>>>>>>>>	>>>>>>>>>>

(against the fibers)

	ⲙⲓⲫⲉ ⲉⲣⲟⲕ	Fight for yourself
	ⲙ̣ ⲡⲉⲛ̣ⲧⲁⲩ	in what has
	ⲫ[ⲱ]ⲡⲉ ⲙⲙⲟⲕ	happened to you
	ϫⲉ ⲟⲩⲡⲱ	because it <is> a
5	ⲛⲏⲣⲓⲁ ⲛⲣⲱ	human evil
	ⲙⲉ ⲧⲛ̄ⲧⲁⲥ	that has
	ⲫⲱⲡⲉ ⲙ	happened
	ⲙⲟⲕ ⲛ̄ⲥⲉ	to you and they …

10 Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?* 52.

11 An important outlier to this group is the Vatican Coptic Codex (P.Vat.Copt. 1), which is too large (15.5 × 11 cm) to be counted as miniature. Although the Vatican Coptic Codex contains oracular dicta similar to what we find in these Coptic miniature codices, it is organized into short numbered responses and is thus significantly different from the Gospel of the Lots of Mary, the fragments from Antinoë, and fragments 1 and 2. See Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?* 6; on the Vatican Coptic Codex, see Arnold van Lantschoot, "Une collection sahidique de 'sortes sanctorum,'" *Mus* 69 (1956): 35–52.

12 Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?* 52 n. 81 adds two further entries to this list: an unpublished *sortes* fragment from Oxyrhynchus and a Coptic oracle to be edited by Wolf-Peter Funk.

Similar to the Gospel of the Lots of Mary, an oracular dictum in fragment 1 begins with a *paragraphos* and concludes with a series of *diplai*. Consequently, fragment 1 contains the second half of one oracle and the beginning of another. It is likely that fragment 1 was produced sometime between the fifth and seventh century; this is the period in which Coptic miniature codices flourished (roughly from the late fourth to the sixth or seventh century),[13] and also corresponds to the approximate dates for manuscripts that share the same formulaic dicta.[14]

The second manuscript, fragment 2, is a parchment bifolium, of which survives one full and one partial leaf, from a codex with page dimensions of 6 cm wide by 7 cm.[15]

Fragment 2

	ⲉⲕⲟⲩⲱϣ ⲉ ⲭ̣ⲉⲕ	While you wish to complete
	ⲟⲩϩⲱⲃ ⲉⲃⲟⲗ	a task,
	ⲉⲛ ⲡⲉϥⲟⲩⲟⲉⲓ	it is not
	ϣ ⲁⲛ ⲡⲉ· ⲉⲕ	its time. If
5	ϣⲁⲛⲣϩⲁⲣϣ	you are patient
	ϩⲏⲧ ⲛ̄ ⲟⲩⲕⲟⲩⲓ	for a little while longer,
	ⲕⲛⲁⲭⲓ ⲛ̄ ⲟⲩ	you will
	ⲣ̣ⲁⲱⲉ̣ ϩⲙ̄ ⲡⲉ	rejoice through
	$\overline{\text{ⲭⲥ}}$ vacat	Christ.

Fragment 2 could be assigned to a likely period of composition from the beginning of the fifth century through the seventh century.

13 See this general trend as outlined by Turner, *Typology*, 29–30; Choat, "Miniature Codices in Coptic"; and Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?* 45. Only from Choat's category of 'education' do we have notable outliers of Coptic miniature codices produced significantly later than this period.

14 The fragments from Antinoë are from the early seventh-century, the Gospel of the Lots of Mary from the fifth to sixth century, and even the "substantially different" Vatican manuscript is from the seventh to eighth century. See Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?* 6, 49–50 n. 67; van Lantschoot, "Une collection sahidique."

15 The manuscript is severely damaged. I present here only a part of it. For the rest, see the forthcoming edition in P.Oxy.

2 Oxyrhynchus and Oracles in Late Antiquity

The portrait of late antique Oxyrhynchus that appears in the literary and documentary record is that of a polis with a burgeoning Christian population.[16] According to the *Historia monachorum in Aegypto*, there were twelve churches at Oxyrhynchus and thousands of monastics in the area already by the beginning of the fifth century.[17] While the account in the *Historia monachorum* may be hyperbolic, especially regarding the number of monastics, there is corroborating evidence from fifth- and sixth-century church lists that similarly attest to a large concentration of Christian churches in Oxyrhynchus.[18] Moreover, an impressive and still growing number of early New Testament manuscripts from Oxyrhynchus continues to be published.[19] In addition to these numerous biblical texts, the Oxyrhynchus papyri attest to the popularity of some well-known non-canonical Christian literary texts, such as the Gospel of Thomas[20] and the Shepherd of Hermas.[21] Various documentary papyri

16 P.Oxy. 2637, from 304 CE, records the property of a church in the Oxyrhynchite village of Chysis during Diocletian's persecution. See AnneMarie Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), 189–210. For the identification of Oxyrhynchus as a polis, see Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 45–109, esp. 46–47, discussing the expansion of this designation from four Egyptian cities (Antinoopolis, Naukratis, Alexandria, and Ptolemais) to "four dozen or so nome capitals of tetrarchic Egypt."

17 *Hist. mon.* 5. Georgia Frank argues that the narrative of *Hist. mon.* cannot be reduced to simple hyperbole, but rather uses symbolic language reflecting memory and experience. Frank, "Miracles, Monks, and Monuments," in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, ed. David Frankfurter (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 483–505.

18 P.Oxy. 1357, 4617, 4618, 4619, and 4620, and Arietta Papaconstantinou, "The Cult of Saints: A Haven of Continuity in a Changing World?" in *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300–700*, ed. Roger Bagnall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 350–67, esp. 354.

19 In a 2007 essay, Eldon Epp counted forty-seven New Testament Papyri and twelve parchments with New Testament texts. Eldon Jay Epp, "New Testament Papyri and the Transmission of the New Testament," in Bowman, *Oxyrhynchus*, 315–31. A recent search on the Leuven Database of Ancient Books gives fifty-six papyri and twelve parchments (author = New Testament; provenance = U19 (Oxyrhynchus); material = papyrus, resp. parchment; language = Greek; type = literary; conducted May 16, 2018).

20 P.Oxy. 1, 654 and 655. AnneMarie Luijendijk, "Reading the *Gospel of Thomas* in the Third Century: Three Oxyrhynchus Papyri and Origen's homilies," in *Reading New Testament Papyri in Context / Lire les papyrus du Nouveau Testament dans leur contexte. Actes du colloque des 22–24 octobre 2009 à l'Université de Lausanne*, ed. Claire Clivaz and Jean Zumstein in collaboration with Jenny Read-Heimerdinger and Julie Paik (Leuven: Peeters, 2011), 241–67.

21 See Malcolm Choat and Rachel Yuen-Collingridge, "The Egyptian Hermas: The Shepherd in Egypt before Constantine," in *Early Christian Manuscripts. Examples of Applied Method and Approach*, ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas, Texts and Editions for

also provide us with glimpses into the daily lives of ancient Christians in Oxyrhynchus.[22]

Although they were deposited in the increasingly 'Christianized'[23] polis of Oxyrhynchus, we should not facilely assume that fragments 1 and 2 were composed by or for Christians, or that they were produced in Oxyrhynchus, rather than having been brought there from somewhere else.[24] Thus, as part of our task in determining the most likely social context for fragments 1 and 2, we shall consider three significant elements of these texts, all of which point to Christian production and/or consumption: scribal features, language, and content.

Determining whether a text was or was not written by a Christian is not an exact science; yet, we can with some certainty determine (but not preclude) Christian scribal production through a close and ideally aggregative analysis of a number of distinctly Christian features: formulaic epistolary salutations and conclusions, onomastics, biblical allusions and quotations, references to Christian liturgical practices and offices, and unique scribal practices such as *nomina sacra*.[25] The use of *nomina sacra* is especially relevant to the current

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New Testament Study (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2010), 191–212. In addition to ten previously known fragments of the Shepherd of Hermas from Oxyrhynchus (P.Oxy. 404, 1172+3526, 1599, 1783, 1828, 3527, 3528, 4705, 4706, 4707), we now have a fourth- or fifth-century Coptic fragment as well, edited by Geoffrey S. Smith, "The Shepherd of Hermas, Mandates v.2–vi.1," in *The Oxyrhynchus Papyri* (forthcoming).

22 Colin Roberts, *Manuscript, Society, and Belief in Early Christian Egypt* (London: Oxford University Press, 1979); Malcolm Choat, *Belief and Cult in Fourth-Century Papyri* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2006); Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*.

23 Although the transformation from 'pagan' to Christian society has sometimes been characterized as an agonistic process wherein Christians cemented a 'Christianized' religious landscape by forcefully converting active pagan religious sites to churches, Roger Bagnall has cautioned against this zero-sum narrative. According to Bagnall, this narrative posits a false binary of only two players, Christians and pagans. In contrast, he argues that we must be sensitive to additional factors so we can more fully and accurately account for the phenomena of late antique religious history. Thus, "if we can free ourselves from this simpleminded notion [of a binary], we can look at issues like the abandonment of traditional uses of temples without presuming that Christianity is the cause." Bagnall, "Models and Evidence in the Study of Religion in Late Roman Egypt," in *From Temple to Church: Destruction and Renewal of Local Cultic Topography in Late Antiquity*, ed. Johannes Hahn, Stephen Emmel, and Ulrich Gotter (Leiden: Brill, 2008), 23–41, at 39; cf. Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 261–309.

24 Over half a century ago, E. G. Turner observed that it was not impossible for texts from other nomes to end up on the trash-heap at Oxyrhynchus. Turner, "Roman Oxyrhynchus," *JEA* 38 (1952): 78–93; this article has been reprinted in *Oxyrhynchus: A City and Its Texts*, ed. A. K. Bowman et al. (London: Egypt Exploration Society, 2007), 141–54.

25 Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord*, 25–55, esp. 29–30.

discussion because fragment 2 contains the *nomen sacrum* $\overline{\text{xc}}$ and therefore suggests a Christian scribe, and perhaps a Christian practitioner and clientele as well. Their date of composition (fifth century or later) and language (Coptic) further point to Christian authorship and/or usage.[26] Finally, fragments 1 and 2 share nearly identical formulaic dicta with contemporary oracular texts found at other Christian shrines in Egypt.[27] The shrine to Philoxenus in Oxyrhynchus, like the shrine to Colluthus at Antinoë, was affiliated with a variety of oracular practices in antiquity.[28] As already noted, we have long had papyrological evidence for the use of lot oracles at the shrine to Philoxenus in Oxyrhynchus.[29]

It appears likely that fragments 1 and 2 have a Christian provenance and emerged from a social milieu similar to the Gospel of the Lots of Mary and the oracular fragments from Antinoë published by Papini. In the following section, I reconstruct the likely historical context for fragments 1 and 2. Of special importance will be identifying the ritual specialist or scribe responsible for creating these fragments and recovering some of the possible experience surrounding the encounter between the client and specialist.

3 Producers and Consumers of Christian Oracular Practices in Late Antique Egypt

If we follow the classification that AnneMarie Luijendijk and William Klingshirn outlined in chapter one, which differentiates *sortes* that were used bibliomantically (group 3) from the other types, used as one might say,

26 Scholars increasingly accept the fact that during this period Coptic literary texts were produced almost exclusively by Christians. As Stephen Emmel observes, "so far as one can tell from its fragmentary remains, Coptic literature was entirely religious in character and almost entirely Christian." Emmel, "Coptic Literature in the Byzantine and Early Islamic World," in Bagnall, *Egypt in the Byzantine World*, 83. Sub-literary texts, however, such as magical, astrological, medical, etc., are not assumed to be Christian without additional justification.

27 Lucia Papini, "Fragments of the *Sortes Sanctorum* from the Shrine to St. Colluthus," in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antiquity*, ed. David Frankfurter (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 393–401; Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?* passim.

28 Arietta Papaconstantinou, "Les oracles chrétiens dans l'Égypte byzantine: le témoignage des papyrus," *ZPE* 104 (1994): 281–86; Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte: des Byzantins aux Abbassides. L'apport des inscriptions et des papyrus grecs et coptes* (Paris: CNRS, 2001); Papaconstantinou, "Cult of the Saints."

29 Youtie, "Questions to a Christian Oracle." On the relationship between lot oracles and saint shrines, see the work of Papaconstantinou cited above and David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1998), 145–97, esp. 193–95.

procedurally, fragments 1 and 2 do not correspond precisely to either model. In comparison with those *sortes* used as part of a repetitive and repeatable procedure, there are no technologies within fragments 1 or 2 to randomize the drawing of lots, for example, no apparent page numbers, organization of text into decades, or correlation between the casting of *astragaloi* and specific oracular predictions.[30] Conversely, in instances where bibliomancy is employed to obtain an 'instant oracle,'[31] the texts used are culturally significant and considered divinely inspired, for example, Homer, Vergil, the Torah, and the New Testament.[32] Unlike the Gospel of the Lots of Mary, which programmatically begins with a declaration of its own religious authority as the "Gospel of the Lots given to Mary the Mother of Jesus Christ by the angel Gabriel," we have no evidence within fragments 1 and 2 of such a grand self-understanding.[33] We can imagine that fragments 1 and 2 could be opened at random to obtain an inspired oracular prediction; yet, the question then remains: why would a collection of *sortes* without any conspicuous randomizing technology or

30 In contrast, the Sortes Astrampsychi were used thus: a customer would select a question from a list of ninety-two options that best conveyed his or her concern. After selecting a question, the customer would pick a number between one and ten and add this to the number of the original question to arrive at a sum that indicated the appropriate response. In this way, there were ninety-two questions with ten possible answers to each question. To obscure this process, however, the ten answers to each question were staggered over ten different decades (i.e. groups of ten) "such that the first answer appears as number 1 in its decade, and its second answer appeared as number 2 in the following decade, and so on" (William Hansen, *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature* [Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998], 289). As a further complication to the overall process, an additional eleven decades of dummy responses were added. The opaqueness of the book and this divinatory process likely heightened the authority of the practitioner as well the ascribed reliability of the oracular pronouncements. For examples of Sortes Astrampsychi from Oxyrhynchus, see P.Oxy. 1477, 2832, 2833, 3330, 4581; see *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. 1: *Ecdosis prior*, ed. G. M. Browne (Leipzig: Teubner, 1983), *Sortes Astrampsychi* vol. 2: *Ecdosis altera*, ed. R. Stewart (Leipzig: Teubner, 2001), and Franziska Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi: Problemlösungsstrategien durch Orakel im römischen Ägypten* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

31 Pieter van der Horst, "*Sortes*: Sacred Books as Instant Oracles in Late Antiquity," in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. Leonard V. Rugers, Pieter van der Horst, H. W. Havelaar, and L. Teugels (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 143–73.

32 Also Augustine, *Conf.* VIII,12,29, self-consciously evokes Athanasius, *Vit. Ant.* 2; cf. 1 Macc 3:48.

33 Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?* 19: "With the mention of the word gospel, the guarantee that one shall find what is sought, and admonition not to doubt, the opening words are programmatic for the entire book. The clause about Gabriel functions to describe Mary's access to the divine and thus to authorize the book's insights and to establish its efficacy. These introductory pages would also lend the diviner and the divinatory session the legitimacy of an established Christian authority."

propagandist self-declarations be considered sacred or important enough that a chance encounter with the text could convey a divine prognostication?[34]

We may find an answer in other instances of divinatory practice in late antique Egypt: clients invested their trust either in the authority and reputation of the specialist who guided them through the divination process, or in the site in which this activity took place, or both. To put this another way, fragments 1 and 2 have more in common with 'procedural' *sortes* insofar as they appear to require a specialist to guide the client through the proper use of our divinatory texts.[35] This raises the question: what do we know about the producers and the consumers of such divinatory texts?

With regard to producers, what do we imagine to be the sociological profile of a successful oracle-monger in late antique Egypt? How or from where did the oracle-monger derive the authority to compose and collaboratively consult oracles alongside his or her clientele?[36] To answer these questions, I propose three models of ritual specialists that we can use to imagine the likely producer of fragments 1 and 2: an independent scribal entrepreneur; an independent and itinerant religious entrepreneur; and an institutionally affiliated cleric.

In the case of the independent scribal entrepreneur, we are looking for a local scribe who was accustomed to hiring out his or her services to a body of non-literate clientele. In this way, the entrepreneur acted as a literary intermediary between the largely illiterate[37] population of his or her village or polis and

34 Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?* 64 argues that the Gospel of the Lots of Mary, due to the absence of any technologies for randomization, was likely used bibliomantically: "The popularity of bibliomancy, along with the fact that the text is entitled 'Gospel,' suggests that we should consider it a viable operating system for our book: that either diviner or client opened the little codex at random and took the page where it opened as containing the answer to the question. The book's layout, with two-facing pages deliberately opening up to one answer, makes this a very plausible hypothesis."

35 A vivid description of how a ritual specialist would act as an intermediary for his client is given by William Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul: The *Sortes Sangallenses*," in *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter T. Struck (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 99–128. According to Klingshirn, a diviner would guide his clients by closely analyzing and dialogically interacting with their behaviors and concerns, and thereby arrive at a stock question and response that would satisfy the client.

36 For more on the collaborative consultation and negotiation of meaning between the diviner and client, see Klingshirn, "Christian Divination," 106–11; Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?* 15–16, 65–78.

37 On literacy and illiteracy in antiquity, see the classic study by William Harris, *Ancient Literacy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), and the more recent volume by William Johnson and Holt Parker, eds., *Ancient Literacies: The Culture of Reading in Greece and Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

the various departments of governmental bureaucracy.[38] The sixth-century professional scribe Dioscorus of Aphrodite closely resembles this profile.[39] In addition to being an educated lawyer mired in various legal disputes,[40] Dioscorus was a well-trained bilingual scribe who represented the interests of his clients before government authorities at various levels.[41] Furthermore, there is some indication from his extensive archive that Dioscorus could produce ritual texts.

Alongside his documentary and literary texts,[42] Dioscorus' archive preserves a small Greek spell for protection against evil spirits (P.Cair.Masp. II 67188).[43] On the basis of this brief spell, David Frankfurter has noted that Dioscorus, as a 'master of texts,' could have followed the instructions of a grimoire to compose

38 On literary intermediaries generally, see Bagnall, *Egypt in Late Antiquity*, 246–51. On Dioscorus in particular, Jean-Luc Fournet, "Le système des intermédiaires dans les reçus ficaux byzantine et ses implications chronologiques sur le Dioscore d'Aphrodité," *APF* 46 (2000): 233–47.

39 On Dioscorus generally, see Leslie S. B. MacCoull, *Dioscorus of Aphrodito: His Work and His World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988); Jean-Luc Fournet, *Hellénisme dans l'Égypte du VI siècle: La bibliothèque et l'oeuvre de Dioscore d'Aphrodité* (Paris: Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1999); and the collected essays in Jean-Luc Fournet, ed., *Les archives de Dioscore d'Aphrodité cent ans après leur découverte. Histoire et culture dans l'Égypte byzantine* (Paris: De Boccard, 2008).

40 P.Cair.Masp. I 67024–67025, 67026–67027, and 67028, discussed at length by Peter van Minnen, "Dioscorus and the Law," in *Learned Antiquity: Scholarship and Society in the Near-East, the Greco-Roman World, and the Early Medieval West*, ed. Alasdair MacDonald, Michael Twomey, and Gerrit Reinik (Leuven: Peeters, 2003), 115–33.

41 In addition to his role as a notary in which he often wrote petitions, Dioscorus travelled at least once to Constantinople to intercede for his hometown of Aphrodite. MacCoull, *Dioscorus*, 9–11.

42 In addition to the studies of Dioscorus cited above, see Willy Clarysse, "Literary Papyri in Documentary 'Archives,'" in *Egypt and the Hellenistic World*, ed. Edmond van 't Dack, P. Van Dessel, and W. Van Gucht (Leuven: Peeters, 1983), 43–61, esp. 55–57; Jean-Luc Fournet, "Between Literary Tradition and Cultural Change: The Poetic and Documentary Production of Dioscorus of Aphrodite," in MacDonald et al., *Learned Antiquity*, 101–14; Sarah Clackson, "Coptic or Greek? Bilingualism in the Papyri," in *The Multilingual Experience in Egypt from the Ptolemies to the Abbasids*, ed. Arietta Papaconstantinou (Surrey: Ashgate, 2010), 73–104, esp. 95–97.

43 P.Cair.Masp. II 67188; Leslie S. B. MacCoull, "P.Cair.Masp. II 67188 verso 1–5: The Gnostica of Dioscorus of Aphrodito," *Tyche* 2 (1987): 95–97, trans. Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), no. 22: "[Christ, I adjure] you, O Lord, almighty, first-begotten, self-begotten, begotten without semen […] as well as all-seeing are you, and Yao, Sabao, Brinthao: Keep me as a son, protect me from every evil spirit, and subject to me every spirit of impure, destroying demons – on the earth, under the earth, of the water and of the land – and every phantom. Christ!"

"spells and rites to negotiate everyday life and crises" for his clientele.[44] Is it likely, then, that Dioscorus and scribes like him would compose and sell incantations and possibly even divinatory texts such as fragments 1 and 2?

I would say no. Though Dioscorus *could* have followed the directions of a grimoire, we have no evidence from his archive that he had access to one. As the spell of P.Cair.Masp. II 67188 belonged to Dioscorus himself, it does not indicate that he commercially produced spells for others.[45] No evidence from Dioscorus's archive suggests that he was familiar with other ritual or divinatory texts. It therefore appears that entrepreneurial scribes such as Dioscorus were consulted if someone needed help adjudicating a contract of property exchange or protesting a tax bill. But when it came to consulting the will of the gods, ancient Egyptians likely would have sought out specialists acclaimed for their prognostications.

In the case of the second option, we have an oracle-monger whose authority was an extension of his or her personal charisma, someone who has acquired a reputation for being a particularly effective ritual performer or 'magician.'[46] According to such a model, this specialist would travel from town to town and offer his or her services as a ritual intermediary who, equipped with the right books and skills, could sell clients a potent love spell or provide reliable prognostication and divination.[47] Due to this itinerant lifestyle, the advantage of miniature codices for transportability would be obvious. Though this model is appealing, David Frankfurter has strongly challenged its viability for the late antique Egyptian context. According to Frankfurter, the model of an itinerant ritual specialist is unconvincing for the Egyptian milieu because religious authority and scribal professionalism were controlled and centralized at local and regional religious centers such as temples, shrines, and monasteries.

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44 David Frankfurter, "Ritual Expertise in Roman Egypt and the Problem of the Category 'Magician,'" in *Envisioning Magic: A Princeton Seminar and Symposium*, ed. Peter Schäfer and Hans G. Kippenberg (Leiden: Brill, 1997), 128 n. 35.

45 As Papaconstantinou, "Cult of Saints," 360, has observed in instances of formulaic texts such as amulets or oracular dicta, the consistency and repetition of formulae likely required the work of professionals. Without additional evidence, it cannot be demonstrated that Dioscorus had the professional materials, such as exemplars, or even the interest of clients for him to turn a profit by producing formulaic ritual or oracular texts.

46 For a series of colorful anecdotes, see Matthew Dickie, *Magic and Magicians in the Greco-Roman World* (London: Routledge, 2001), esp. 224–43, 311–19.

47 The large Theban cache of texts that comprise much of the PGM are believed to have been a single library possibly belonging to and eventually buried with an individual ritual expert. Roger Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2009), 83–84.

He therefore concluded that when we look for the "authors, compilers, and dispensers" of ritually performative texts, "the tracks seem to lead repeatedly to the doors of the monastery or the ecclesiastical apparatus of the shrine."[48]

Finally, for the third option, we have the model of the clergyman who officiates at saint shrines like those of Colluthus and Philoxenus where other divinatory practices such as lots were regularly employed. As Papaconstantinou, Papini, and Luijendijk have demonstrated,[49] these regional shrines became popular centers of pilgrimage, so much so that a shrine such as that of Colluthus at Antinoë preserved hundreds of lots from visitors in their archives.[50] Similarly, P.Oxy. 1926 and P.Harr. 54 indicate that the shrine to Philoxenus in Oxyrhynchus was also affiliated with the practice of lot divination.[51] Frankfurter sees the practice of lot divination at Christian shrines as a continuation of indigenous religious practice,[52] and has argues that *sortes* book collections, such as fragments 1 and 2, were 'hybrids' or expansions of these ticket oracles submitted at shrines like the ones to Colluthus and Philoxenus.[53]

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48 Frankfurter, "Ritual Expertise," 128; cf. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 198–237. For a cross-cultural, anthropological survey of the stereotypical traits of a magician, see Frankfurter, "Dynamics of Ritual Expertise in Antiquity and Beyond: Toward a New Taxonomy of 'Magicians,'" in *Magic and Ritual in the Ancient World*, ed. Paul Mirecki and Marvin Meyer (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 159–78.

49 Papaconstantinou, "Les oracles chrétiens"; Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints*; Papaconstantinou, "Cult of the Saints"; Lucia Papini, "Biglietti oracolari in copto dalla necropoli nord di Antinoe," in *Acts of the Second International Congress of Coptic Studies*, ed. Tito Orlandi and Frederik Wisse (Rome: C. I. M., 1985), 245–55; Papini, "Domande oracolari elenco delle attestazioni in greco ed in copto," *Analecta Papyrologica* 4 (1992): 21–27; Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?*

50 Alain Delattre, "Nouveaux textes coptes d'Antinoé," *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth International Congress of Papyrology, Ann Arbor 2007*, ed. Traianos Gagos (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Library, Scholarly Publishing Office, 2010), 171–74.

51 P.Oxy. 1926: "My Lord God almighty and St. Philoxenus my patron, I beseech you through the great name of the Lord God, if it is not your will for me to speak about the bank or about the weighing office, direct me to find out that I may not speak." Cf. P.Harr. 54: "My Lord God almighty and St. Philoxenus my patron, I beseech you through the great name of the Lord God, if it is your will and you help me get the banking business, I invoke you to direct me to find out and speak" (trans. Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, nos. 32–33).

52 Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 12: "What if we were to approach Roman Egypt by assuming the persistence of religious needs and consequent resilience of religion itself? What if we regarded new developments and innovations as potential vehicles of continuity and religious revitalization?".

53 David Frankfurter, "Fragments of *Sortes Sanctorum* from the Shrine of St. Colluthos," in Frankfurter, *Pilgrimage and Holy Space*, 393; Frankfurter, "Voices, Books, and Dreams: The Diversification of Divination Media in Late Antique Egypt" in Johnston, *Mantikê*, 246; Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 179–97.

Thus, oracular authority, though in a slightly mutated form, continued to be controlled and mediated by priestly figures at local cult centers in Roman and Christian Egypt.[54]

Of the three models I outlined, a Christian cleric at a saint shrine is the most likely type of person to have produced and used fragments 1 and 2. Since both manuscripts were found at Oxyrhynchus, a cleric at the church dedicated to Saint Philoxenus is the most probable candidate. I agree with Frankfurter that *sortes* collections such as fragments 1 and 2 are likely genealogically dependent on ticket divination.[55] Yet does the adoption of an indigenous religious practice by Christians mean that they did little to change or 'Christianize' it?[56]

Papaconstantinou has observed that although some scholars go to great lengths to document 'survivals' from ancient Egypt into late antique Christian Egypt, they often erroneously conflate action with an underlying belief: "'Survival' scholars tend to consider that the same literary or ritual act always presupposes the same belief or conception, be it unconsciously."[57] The peril of such an approach is that it leads to selective overemphasis on continuity with ancient or indigenous beliefs and practices and downplays concurrent factors and explanations.[58] For example, by examining concurrent ideological struggles, Papaconstantinou recognized that Coptic Christians rhetorically highlighted their indigenous character as part of a broader, sectarian competition against their rivals, the 'foreign' Chalcedonian Christians.[59] In an effort to situate fragments 1 and 2 in their late antique context, I now return to the second part the question I posed earlier: what can we know about the consumers of fragments 1 and 2 and their experience of these texts?

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54 Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 145–237; Frankfurter, "Voices, Books, and Dreams."

55 In Frankfurter's discussion of the formal similarities between the ticket and *sortes* manuals (*Religion in Roman Egypt*, 182–83), he draws upon Randall Stewart's article "The Oracular *ei*," *Greek, Byzantine, and Roman Studies* 26.1 (1985): 67–73.

56 Cf. Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 176: "But when one follows the cults, the techniques, and the very questions asked, back into the Ptolemaic and the pharaonic times, the picture offered is very much one of continuity … thus from a broader Egyptological perspective the Roman period is but a chapter in the perpetual rise and decline of regional oracle cults spanning well over a millennium."

57 Arietta Papaconstantinou, "Historiography, Hagiography, and the Making of the Coptic 'Church of the Martyrs' in Early Islamic Egypt," *DOP* 60 (2006): 67.

58 Papaconstantinou, "Historiography," 74; Bagnall, "Models and Evidence." A noteworthy example is practice of mummification. Though this practice continued, its meaning was adapted so that it became for some Christians a powerful reminder of the doctrine of bodily resurrection. See Françoise Dunand, "Between Tradition and Innovation: Egyptian Funeral Practices in Late Antiquity," in *Egypt in the Byzantine World*, 163–84.

59 Papaconstantinou, "Historiography," 72.

If fragments 1 and 2 were composed and/or used at the Church to Saint Philoxenus in Oxyrhynchus sometime between the fifth and seventh centuries, what would a client at that time see and experience upon entering the church? The Church to Philoxenus is first mentioned in a receipt of payment from the year 487 (P.Oxy. 1950).[60] The church likely began as a small martyr's chapel; but according to an inventory of building materials made by a stonemason named Phileas (P.Oxy. 2041), it is clear that it was later rebuilt and significantly enlarged at the end of the sixth or beginning of the seventh century.[61] Furthermore, it appears that the enlarged church might have been comparable in size to other contemporary churches dedicated to martyrs, such as the Church to Saint Menas.[62] While it may be impossible to reconstruct the configuration of the Church to Philoxenus with any real certainty, oracular consultation likely occurred in a secondary structure that was part of the larger compound yet external to the church itself.[63] There, in a more secluded and intimate setting, we can imagine a pilgrim and a cleric, as client and specialist, could divine the future together under the auspices of Saint Philoxenus.

Moreover, P.Oxy. 1357, a liturgical calendar from the year 535–536, attests to the prominence of the Church to Philoxenus in the construction of ritual time and space for Oxyrhynchite Christians during the period in which fragments 1 and 2 were likely composed in the fifth to seventh centuries.[64] The Church to Philoxenus is listed at least seven times during the five months preserved in this liturgical calendar.[65] On these days, the Church to Philoxenus was the site of a *synaxis*, a liturgical celebration led by the bishop.[66]

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60 The Church to Philoxenus is also mentioned in a fifth-century list of churches (P.Oxy. 4617) and a fifth- or sixth-century record of offerings to religious institutions (P.Oxy. 4620).

61 Arietta Papaconstantinou, "La reconstruction de Saint-Philoxène à Oxyrhynchos: L'inventaire dressé par Philéas le tailleur de pierres," in *Mélanges Jean-Pierre Sodini* (Paris: Association des Amis du Centre d'Histoire et Civilisation de Byzance, 2005): 183–92.

62 Papaconstantinou, "Reconstruction," 185–86. Although P.Oxy. 2041 mentions a surprisingly large number of column capitals and bases (120), Papaconstantinou determined it likely that many of them were part of structures external to the church itself.

63 Papaconstantinou, "Reconstruction," 186.

64 Arietta Papaconstantinou, "La liturgie stationnale à Oxyrhynchos dans la première moitié du 6e siècle. Réédition et commentaire du POxy XI 1357," *REByz* 54 (1996): 135–59.

65 I.e., the 22–25th of Choiak, the 13th of Tybi, the 21st of Mecheir, and an unknown day in Phamenoth. The Church to Philoxenus is possibly mentioned as the site of the Sunday celebration on the 22nd of Mecheir.

66 Papaconstantinou, "Liturgie stationnale," 155–57, argues convincingly that this is the local bishop who had recently returned from Alexandria where he participated in the election of a new patriarch.

Thus, it may be that on these days of elevated ceremonies and processions, potential clients would come for the liturgical celebration, and stay after for oracular prognostication. For those self-selecting clients who first attended the *synaxis* and afterward consulted oracular texts with a cleric, the continuity of ritual space would likely heighten the perceived authority and reliability of the divinatory practices and claims. In this way, the consultation, likely a bibliomantic opening to a random page in the case of fragments 1 and 2, was seen as legitimate in part due to its proximity to the cult of Saint Philoxenus.

4 Conclusion

Although my claim that fragments 1 and 2 were produced within the confines of the martyr cult to Saint Philoxenus remains only a hypothesis, I believe it to be the most plausible one when we consider the landscape of oracular practice in late antique Egypt. This hypothesis, moreover, reconciles with the rise of martyr cults during the fifth to seventh centuries and the roles they played as centers of divinatory practices.[67] In any case, as further instances of late antique Coptic sortilege, fragments 1 and 2 belong to a broader textual phenomenon in which we find a high degree of standardization in the formulation of oracular dicta used by diviners and clients. As additional texts continue to come to light, we will surely be able to reconstruct even more precisely their origins in late antique Egypt.

67 See the work of Arietta Papaconstantinou cited throughout this chapter.

CHAPTER 10

Sortes, Scribality, and Syncretism: Ritual Experts and the Great Tradition in Byzantine Egypt

David Frankfurter

This chapter folds the phenomenon of the divination book in late antique Egypt into a range of Greek and Coptic texts that often seem anomalous to the historian of Christianity, including magical texts and ticket oracles. Of course, what strikes us as anomalous often has more to do with what we deem normative; and in this case a predisposition to imagine Egyptian Christianity as based in monastic rules and Bible commentaries will inevitably lead the traditional church historian to gape at these magical and divinatory texts, artifacts of religion in practice, with incomprehension and censure. One of the goals of this chapter, then, is to flesh out the context of these artifacts such that they become, not anomalous, but distinctive of Egyptian Christianity.

I will address two principal contexts for this range of texts. First, they each imply some type of *ritual* context, in relation to which literate agents or specialists compose the text – *in the course of* engaging with clients or laity, often when these folk visit saints' shrines at festivals or pilgrimages. Encouraged by family, fellow pilgrims, or shrine personnel, a client would approach a scribe or attendant for aid in divination or in magical resolution of some private crisis. Thus placed in the role of ritual expert, the scribe or attendant demonstrates the performances of an appropriate ceremony – by dispensing some substance, by offering words of blessing, or by performing it then and there, using dice (perhaps) to invite a message from a *sortes* book.[1] Writing out a spell may involve copying a master-text with the client's name inserted; or it could involve improvising from a memory-store of words and formulas. The total 'performance' thus effectively extends from the initial consultation to the point at which the client feels all measures have been fulfilled, perhaps back at home or in some neutral space. The resulting textual artifact – the spell, amulet, *sortes* book, or oracle ticket – thus reflects the regular interaction of ritual experts with local communities and their folklore, crises, and traditions:

1 William E. Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul: The *Sortes Sangallenses*," in *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter Struck, RGRW 155 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 108–10.

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for example, people's expectations of the written word, their familiarity with liturgy, as well as the charms they sing to calm infants or avert the evil eye.

Second, they all suggest a *scribal context*: an internal culture of literate experts in late antique Egypt, its diverse monastic settings, and the various concepts of book and writing, preservation and composition, and canon and apocryphon, that are reflected in these ritual texts. To what extent do divinatory and magical texts actually extend the creative work involved in copying biblical and parabiblical (apocryphal) narrative or composing liturgical materials, or simply participating in and interpreting liturgy? Did the craft of monastic writing and the role of monastic literati in fact motivate a diversity of compositions and textual innovations? And to what extend did charms, amulets, and other forms of written blessings or spells also carry the charisma of a particularly notable monk – the agency of a holy man, in fact, rather than a simple technician?

Each of these contexts – ritual and scribal – makes sense of anomalous materials like divination books and magical texts; and by the same token these anomalous textual artifacts themselves *reveal* these contexts as vital social worlds and sites of religious agency in late antique Egypt. They represent the kinds of cultural 'crucibles' in which Christianity was produced in Egypt.

1 Scribal Expertise and the Development of Ritual Texts

1.1 *Who Were the Scribal Experts in Late Antique Egypt?*

A great number of documents from the second through fourth centuries CE have given historians the impression of a shift in ritual authority from the temple to the independent practitioner, whether priest, pseudo-priest, or maverick wizard. For example, the Greek and Demotic magical papyri, while in many respects products of an Egyptian temple environment, make little reference to actual temple spaces.[2] And the divination book tradition we call the Sortes Astrampsychi appears to have transformed elements of the shrine oracle into

2 On the relationship of the PGM/PDM to Egyptian priesthood see Robert K. Ritner, "Egyptian Magical Practice Under the Roman Empire: The Demotic Spells and Their Religious Context," in *Heidentum: Die religiösen Verhältnisse in den Provinzen*, ed. Wolfgang Haase, vol. II.18.5 of *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995): 3333–79; and Jacco Dieleman, *Priests, Tongues, and Rites: The London-Leiden Magical Manuscripts and Translation in Egyptian Ritual (100–300 CE)*, RGRW 153 (Leiden: Brill, 2005). On the relationship of the spells to actual temple spaces see Jonathan Z. Smith, "Trading Places," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul Mirecki, RGRW 129 (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 13–27.

a single, all-purpose, and portable textual tradition.[3] But we make a mistake if we regard these artifacts of an itinerant ritual expertise as the major trend of the Roman period. There were numerous shrine oracles that continued to invite visitors, and holy men themselves offered tangible senses of space, of sacred 'here-ness,' whether at an existing shrine or a desert cave.[4] Indeed, by the fifth century, the textual artifacts of ritual expertise (like magical texts and books of divination) presumed a relationship, if not to a particular shrine, then at least to that sense of 'institutional' center offered by scriptural or liturgical language. They signified Christianity's authority as a 'great tradition': as both a religious institution historically manifest in monastic and ecclesiastical activities and *the image of* a religious institution, manifest in church buildings, hierarchy of offices, calendar and liturgy, Scripture, and the various holy materials, names, and formulae that derived from liturgy and Scripture.[5]

Note, for example, how a vengeance spell like the following invokes and enumerates heavenly beings through liturgical formulae to accomplish its purposes:

> I ask, I invoke, I worship, I lay my prayer and my request before the throne of God the almighty, Sabaoth …
>
> I appeal to you, Father, I appeal to you, Son, I appeal to you, Holy Spirit, the consubstantial Trinity, the good news of Gabriel the archangel, that you perform my judgment and my revenge and my violence with Tatore and Andres and Maria daughter of Tsibel, with their children. Bring upon them blindness to their two eyes. Bring upon them great pain and jaundice disease and burning fever and trouble and dispersion and ruin. Father, strike them; Son, strike them; God, who exists before the world had yet come into being, strike them. At once, at once! …

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3 On the cultural context of the *sortes* books, see especially Randall Stewart, "The Oracular *ei*," *GRBS 26* (1985): 67–73, and Mary Beard, "Writing and Religion: Ancient Literacy and the Function of the Written Word in Roman Religion," in *Literacy in the Roman World*, ed. Mary Beard et al., Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary series 3 (Ann Arbor: JRA, 1991), 35–58.

4 On the continuity of oracle places, see David Frankfurter, "Voices, Books, and Dreams: The Diversification of Divination Media in Late Antique Egypt," in Johnston and Struck, *Mantikê*, 233–54; Frankfurter, "Syncretism and the Holy Man in Late Antique Egypt," *JECS* 11 (2003): 367–71; and William E. Klingshirn, "Inventing the *sortilegus*: Lot Divination and Cultural Identity in Italy, Rome, and the Provinces," in *Religion in Republican Italy*, ed. Celia E. Schultz and Paul B. Harvey Jr., YCS 33 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 138–39, 143–44.

5 On applying Redfield's notion of the 'Great Tradition' to religions of antiquity, see David Frankfurter, "The Great, The Little, and the Authoritative Tradition in Magic of the Ancient World," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 16 (2014): 11–30.

> O four creatures who stand by the Father, the great God, strike Tatore and Andreas and Maria and her children and everyone who resides with them.... O twenty-four elders who are seated before the Father, strike Tatore and Andreas and Maria, quickly! ... O you who rescued Daniel from the lions' den, strike Maria and Tatore and Andreas with the anger of your wrath. Michael, strike them with your fiery sword. Gabriel, strike them with your fiery sword. Raphael, strike them with your fiery sword. Rakuel, strike them with your fiery sword. Suriel, strike them with your fiery sword. Amen![6]

The actual site designated for intoning such a curse could have been anywhere from the village environs to a church. But more importantly, the liturgical features that drive this curse show the scribal expert's deliberate effort to draw the client's crisis – some utter collapse in relations with several neighboring families – into a kind of performative sphere of ritual efficacy based in ecclesiastical language. The client came to the scribe for his capabilities in this language – as a representative of the scriptural or great tradition and a specialist in its performative expressions. The actual agency in the development of spells like this one (and of divination procedures as well) lies both on the side of the scribal expert and on that of the client who instigates the process.

This is not to deny the existence of entirely freelance, non-ecclesiastical ritual specialists in late antique Egypt as well. For one thing, authority in the magical resolution of crises tends to be spread widely among family-members and townspeople. But there is no good documentation for such an entirely freelance figure – a wizard or *magos*. The 'heathen sorcerer' existed only as the stock opponent to holy men in hagiographical literature.[7] In a predominantly non-literate culture dominated by a religious institution that mystified the book and the sacred word, it was the literate technicians affiliated with that institution who mediated the power commonly imputed to religious books and writing. This was the classic observation of the anthropologist Jack Goody, and it is borne out in African Muslim cultures, south Asian Buddhist cultures, and the medieval west. Many of the local literate agents of the 'great' religious tradition bear particular titles that reflect some (often minor) rank in the institution – like the *faki*s of Sudan who administer Qur'an-soaked water – but

6 Trans. Marvin Meyer and Richard Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (San Francisco: Harper, 1994), no. 91 (Oxford, Bodleian Coptic C. [P] 4).

7 David Frankfurter, "The Perils of Love: Magic and Counter-Magic in Coptic Egypt," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 10 (2001): 480–500.

they gain charisma as ritual experts by virtue of their textual knowledge and their writing ability.[8]

Both the Coptic magical texts and divination texts, in their diverse liturgical or ecclesiastical features, point to the overlapping social worlds of saint's shrine, church, and monastery – the spatial centers of Christianity in the late antique Egyptian landscape. And whether by personal inclination or sense of role, the individual agents of these worlds – monks, cantors, scribes, and so on – administered the authority of church and saint in direct engagement with the quotidian needs of the laity.[9] This mediation we may presume took place sometimes at altars, sometimes in the courtyards of shrines, and certainly in the consulting chambers of monastic *laura*, where hagiographies put the constant dispensing of *eulogia* for visitors. Indeed, the evidence goes beyond the ritual texts themselves. As Valerie Flint and William Klingshirn have documented, Latin sources censure the 'magical' ministrations of *clerici*; and in Egypt, Shenoute of Atripe complains about the "fox claws! Snakes' heads! Crocodiles' teeth! And many other vanities that men put on themselves for their own relief" at the suggestion of holy men, and "still again," he says, "they pour water over themselves or anoint themselves with oil *from elders of the church, or even from monks*!"[10] It is monks and church functionaries, that is, who administer such ritual materials as pious, not covert, extensions of their religious authority.

1.2 *The Evidence of the Ticket Oracles*

This image of a scribal ritual expertise based in some ecclesiastical/monastic authority is most strikingly documented in the various ticket oracles thriving around Egypt from the fifth through seventh centuries. At the shrines of St. Philoxenos at Oxyrhynchus and St. Colluthos at Antinoë, among others, scribes had revitalized a type of divination ritual that had begun in the late second/early first millennium BCE and was popular at many temples from

8 See, e.g., Jack Goody, *The Interface Between the Written and the Oral* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987); Abdullahi Osman El-Tom, "Drinking the Koran," *Africa* 55 (1985): 414–29.

9 Arietta Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte des Byzantins aux Abbassides. L'apport des sources papyrologiques et épigraphiques grecques et coptes* (Paris: CNRS, 2001), 347–48; Frankfurter, "Syncretism and the Holy Man," 371–81.

10 Shenoute, Acephalous Work A14, §§255–62, ed. Tito Orlandi, *Shenute: Contra Origenistas* (Rome: C.I.M., 1985), 18–21. Latin sources: Valerie I. J. Flint, *The Rise of Magic in Early Medieval Europe* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), 355–64; William E. Klingshirn, "Defining the *Sortes Sanctorum*: Gibbon, Du Cange, and Early Christian Lot Divination," *JECS* 10 (2002): 84–87, Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul," 100–1, 113–16.

the Hellenistic period through the third century CE.[11] Clients would pass two alternative instructions on a practical matter, in writing, to the oracle attendants, and the god (as it were) would return the correct instruction on the basis of a ritual we can no longer reconstruct.[12] Still in the Christian period we are invariably struck by their pragmatic inquiries related to health or travel: "O God of our patron, St. Philoxenos, if you command us to bring Anoup to your hospital, show [your] power, and let the message come forth"; or "God of the Christians: Is it your will [that] we give your handmaid Theodora to Joseph?"[13] And surely it is as important that the literate shrine staff is extending itself to the everyday crises of pilgrims as that the medium that staff has developed for this service derives, somehow, from pre-Christian traditions of mediating the authority of holy places and their gods for concerned visitors.

But it is important to note the orthodox character of the invocations: "*O God of* St. Colluthos"; "*My Lord God Almighty and* St. Philoxenos my patron"; or even this one, probably from the Philoxenus shrine: "O God Almighty, holy, true, lover of humanity and creator, father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, show me your truth: Do you wish me to go to Chiout, and shall I find that you are of help to me and gracious? May it be so, Amen."[14] Now, in hagiographical, festival, and miracle texts, saints such as Colluthos and Philoxenus, who appear to and interact with devotees in quite personal terms, are rarely described in such subordinate ways. The scribes, the mediators of oracular inquiry at these shrines, are thus making a deliberate, if formulaic, effort to affirm a particular hierarchy to the Christian pantheon (one not consistent across late antique Christian materials, which celebrated angels and saints). New evidence from the St. Colluthos site points to a more orally-based oracular exchange taking place there as well: folded tickets with only the word συμφέρον, 'let it come to pass,' written between two crosses, which would have been handed

11 Earliest examples: Kim Ryholt, "A Pair of Oracle Petitions Addressed to Horus-of-the-Camp," *JEA* 79 (1993): 189–98; Greek examples from Graeco-Roman period collected in W. Schubart, "Orakelfragen," *ZÄS* 67 (1931): 110–15. See important overviews of the oracle-ticket phenomenon by William Brashear, "The Greek Magical Papyri," in Haase, *Heidentum: Die religiösen Verhältnisse in den Provinzen*, vol. II.18.5 of *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt*, 3448–56; Dominique Valbelle and Geneviève Husson, "Les questions oraculaires d'Égypte: Histoire de la recherche, nouveautés et perspectives," *Egyptian Religion: The Last Thousand Years*, ed. Willy Clarysse et al., 2 vols., OLA 84–85 (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 2:1055–71; and Beard, "Writing and Religion."

12 David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 193–95.

13 Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, nos. 31 (P.Oxy. 1150) and 34 (SB XVIII 13250) respectively.

14 Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, nos. 32, 30 (P.Oxy. 925).

to a client in positive response to an oral inquiry.[15] But here too the process involves some kind of spatial association with St. Colluthos, such that the correct answer might be divined; and the crosses indicate some effort to bring the process under the general authority of the church institution, not just talismanic symbols. In brief, this was no 'heathen' practice, nor even marginal to some putative orthopraxy, but as central a feature of the administration of St. Colluthos's blessings as the incubation miracles hailed in the official shrine legends.

1.3 Sortes Sanctorum *and the Location of Ritual Expertise*

What of the divination books – the *sortes sanctorum*?[16] Again, the temptation has been to focus on their independent, portable nature: an epiphenomenon of an increasingly book- and holy man-centered world. It is an important corrective to note the fragments of a *sortes* book unearthed at the St. Colluthos site – archaeological evidence of *sortes* consultation there *in addition to* ticket-oracles and incubation.[17] A saint's shrine, that is, may well be the place where a diversity of mantic procedures will be cultivated, including those requiring some kind of system or manual for interpreting the omens one has instigated through materials like knucklebones or dice.[18] Any randomized divination procedure – whether dice, tarot, or bibliomancy – invariably implies the intervention of some guiding force, and it is to just such a guiding force that the church or saint's shrine is supposed to offer an especially tangible connection. That's why one would throw the dice at the shrine, not on one's own roof.[19] The authority of the center inspires multiple techniques to draw on the saint's or god's presence, some institutionally sanctioned, some autochthonous or spontaneous (including possession itself as means of embodied divination).[20]

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15 Alain Delattre, "Nouveaux textes coptes d'Antinoé," *Proceedings of the Twenty-Fifth International Congress of Papyrology, Ann Arbor 2007*, ed. Traianos Gagos (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), 173.

16 I am using *sortes sanctorum* to refer generally to divination books that rely on some elements of Christianity for authority, rather than to a particular textual trajectory.

17 Lucia Papini and David Frankfurter, "Fragments of the *Sortes Sanctorum* from the Shrine of St. Colluthos," *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, ed. David Frankfurter, RGRW 134 (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 393–401.

18 Frankfurter, "Voices, Books, and Dreams." On use of dice/knucklebones, see Fritz Graf, "Rolling the Dice for an Answer," in Johnston and Struck, *Mantikê*, 60–62.

19 Compare Graf, "Rolling the Dice for an Answer," 66, 74–76: an agora shrine of Apollo situates the voice and authority of the dice oracle.

20 See David Frankfurter, "Where the Spirits Dwell: Possession, Christianization, and Saint-Shrines in Late Antiquity," *HTR* 103 (2010): 27–46.

Recall, for example, the personal encounters with publicly-read Scripture in church settings that inspired saints like Antony to become renunciants:

> He went into the church pondering these things, and just then it happened that the Gospel was being read, and he heard the Lord saying to the rich man, "If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess…' It was as if sent from God (ὥσπερ θεόθεν) … as if the reading had taken place on his account (ὡς δι᾽ αὐτόν).[21]

These are legends, of course; but as Pieter van der Horst has argued, they seem to reflect some kind of real mantic practice. That is, certain folk, recognizing the regularity of public scripture-readings in the local church, but the apparently arbitrary nature of their contents, may have regarded the verses they haphazardly encountered at the church as divinatory – as God's *directed* word.[22]

We should read the *sortes sanctorum*, then, not as some pocket fortune-telling device but as a systematization of divination procedures that had always depended on the shrine space and on the uses of Scripture and writing at the shrine space.[23] But what can we gather from their literary character? Several oracles from the Gospel of the Lots of Mary seem to presume devotional acts at a shrine: ⲁⲡⲭⲟⲉⲓⲥ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲥⲱⲧⲙ̄ ⲉⲡⲉⲕⲁⲓⲧⲏⲙⲁ, "The Lord God *has heard* your request" says one (no. 6), and another instructs the client to "go make your vows, and *what you have promised*, fulfill it immediately" (no. 25), implying participation in a votive ritual exchange typical of a saint's shrine.[24]

As with the ticket oracles, the extant Christian *sortes* books show a marked orthodox (or monotheizing) quality that stands in important contrast to the independent powers and characters of the saints such as we encounter them in incubation visions and shrine propaganda: "Do not harm your soul, for what

21 Athanasius, *Vit. Ant.* 2., trans. adjusted from Robert C. Gregg, *Athanasius: The Life of Antony and the Letter to Marcellinus* (New York: Paulist, 1980), 31; text in G. J. M. Bartelink, ed., *Athanase d'Alexandrie: Vie d'Antoine*, SC 400 (Paris: Cerf, 2004), 132.

22 Pieter W. van der Horst, "Sortes: Sacred Books as Instant Oracles in Late Antiquity," *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. L. V. Rutgers et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 151–58. On the oracular use of scripture readings see also Pierre Courcelle, "L'enfant et les 'Sorts bibliques," *VC* 7 (1953): 194–220.

23 On writing and systematization in *sortes* books see Klingshirn, "Inventing the *sortilegus*," 143–44, and Hélène Cuvigny, "The Shrine in the *praesidium* of Dios (Eastern Desert of Egypt): Graffiti and Oracles in Context," *Chiron* 40 (2010): 245–99.

24 See Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte*, 324–39.

has come to pass is from God," reads a fragment of such a text from Berlin.[25] Or an example from the Gospel of the Lots of Mary paralleled in the fragments from the Colluthos shrine: "Walk and go immediately. Do not delay. Because it is God who fights for you. He will cause your enemies to be subject to you. If you are patient for a little, you will receive the hope of your salvation and you will be at rest" (no. 31 = Papini B1). It is not St. Colluthos or the Archangel Suriel who advises, but the one God. The same monotheizing character covers the Vatican Coptic *sortes* papyrus, although less so the Christian editions of the Sortes Astrampsychi, which allude to the creative forces of "his holy angels Michael, Gabriel, Raphael, and all the rest."[26] Overall, we might infer a didactic function from this monotheizing character: that the oracular exchange between pilgrim-client and ecclesiastical or monastic diviner was meant not only to resolve questions and disclose divine will, but also to explicate the Christian god's providence – rather than that of other forces – in all aspects of life.[27] The *sortes sanctorum* reflect an ecclesiastical culture focused on the Christian Bible, and thereby they promote a monotheistic ideology in the service of church and shrine, not some popular fortune-telling. Their syncretism, such as we might understand it, involves not the perpetuation of ancient media but simply the incorporation of mantic interests into Christian textuality.[28]

1.4 *Coptic Magical Texts and the Location of Ritual Expertise*

On its face the corpus of magical spells suggests an even broader range of ritual/scribal expertise while still belonging to the world of ecclesiastical scribal experts. Here we find innumerable examples of scribes' dedication to the authority of Scripture and creative application of Scripture to everyday crises. Like the curse spell quoted above, in which the cadences and refrains

25 Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, no. 35 (SB XIV 11658, ed. Kurt Treu, "Varia Christiana I," *APF* 24/25 [1976]: 120).

26 Arnold van Lantschoot, "Une collection sahidique de 'Sortes Sanctorum' (Papyrus Vatican copte 1)," *Mus* 69 (1956): 35–52; cf. Randall Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. 2: *Ecdosis altera*, BSGRT (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2001), 2–3, and 5–6 (Εὐχή). Compare Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul," 106–7 on the theological character of Gallic sortes books.

27 Compare Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul," 106–10.

28 Recently published fragments of a miniature codex from Montserrat may point to the mantic use among monks of the Apophthegmata patrum, which the text seems to quote out of narrative context: see Sofía Torallas Tovar, "A New Sahidic Coptic Fragment: *Sortes Sanctorum* or *Apophthegmata Patrum*?," *JCoptS* 17 (2015): 153–64, esp. 154, 161. If so, the fragments might point to a wider and more voracious appropriation of Christian texts for divination in monastic culture.

of church liturgy were invoked to consign several families to disaster,[29] a 'template' or master spell from the Morgan Library invokes biblical lore for the sake of a wife's pregnancy:

> ✠ Almighty master, Lord, O God, since from the beginning you have created humankind in your likeness and in your image, you also have honored my striving for childbirth. You said to our mother Sarah, "At this time in a year a son will be born to you." Thus also now, look, I invoke you, who is seated upon the cherubim, that you listen to my request today – me, N, son of N – over the chalice of wine that is in my hand, so that when I … it to N daughter of N, you may favor her with a human seed.… I adjure you by your great name and the sufferings you experienced upon the cross: You must bring to pass the words … that have been spoken over this chalice in my hand.[30]

Given the perennial nature of the anxiety for childbearing, and the multiple ritual means by which it was addressed at saints' shrines in Christian Egypt – from ticket oracles to incubation and votive figurines – we should read this text as the effort of an ecclesiastical or monastic scribe to extend the authority of biblical legend and liturgical gesture over maternity itself, composing an oral and gestural ceremony that assimilates the client and his wife to the story of Sarah. As with the *sortes* books, these magical spells reveal scribes' agency in extending the utility of Scripture to diverse social crises. They also reveal the agency of clients – pilgrims, shrine devotees – in asserting their crises and expectations on these scribes, such that some scribe actually composed this spell generically, in *anticipation* of a client's visit to secure pregnancy.

1.5 *The Location of Scribal Ritual Expertise: Conclusions*

It is highly unlikely, on the basis of this textual evidence, that the composition of mantic or ritual materials can be attributed to such hoary inventions as 'magicians' or 'deviant priests' or 'diviners.' Rather, all evidence points to the role of ecclesiastical scribe or literate monk, which evidently could be extended in multiple ways and domains.[31] Such a figure might promote a saint's powers

29 Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, no. 91; compare no. 29.

30 Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, no. 83 (Pierpont Morgan M662B 222).

31 See also Siegfried G. Richter, "Bemerkungen zu magischen Elementen koptischer Zaubertexte," *Akten des 21. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses. Berlin 1995*, ed. Bärbel Kramer, Wolfgang Luppe, and Herwig Maehler, Archiv für Papyrusforschung 3 (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1997), 835–46; Jacques van der Vliet, review of S. Pernigotti, *Testi della magia copta* (Imola: La mandragora, 2000) in *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 62:3–4 (2005): 278–79; van

through inscribing ticket oracles that mediate divine guidance over everyday life. He might draw on popular and ecclesiastical traditions of efficacious speech, including biblical lore, to write out a charm or a curse. He might demonstrate the authority of the Christian institution through divination procedures that produce orthodox formulations from a book – Bible or *sortes*. But the agency behind these eclectic scribal practices does not lie solely with these ritual specialists. Laity – such as pilgrims, devotees, the desperate, the concerned, the devious – are actors as well, demanding resolutions, divination, and magical substances from the shrine attendants and ritual specialists who, they think, ought to purvey such services in the first place. And of course clients and experts share the same culture of magical speech and writing, folklore and mythic geography.

In order to understand this model of the scribal ritual expert and his magical and divination functions it is helpful to refer by comparison to a modern analogue, which can potentially provide a fuller illustration of the dynamics of scribal ritual expertise in local Christianity. The most provocative modern analogue in this case is the Ethiopian *däbtära*, a rank of church cantor responsible for the elaborate exorcistic scrolls found in many museums, each inscribed for specific clients on the basis of extensive demonological manuals.[32] While regarded with suspicion, as wizards and charlatans, by ordained priests and urbane Ethiopians, their ecclesiastical affiliation and their authority were in no way deviant in the eyes of local clients. And in several ways the *däbtära*'s status in the 'lived Christianity' of modern Ethiopia recalls that of ecclesiastical scribes in late antique Egypt. Both cultures incorporated, through the influence of Christianity, an elaborate and magical notion of the holy book and a rank of specialists in the use of that book and its language: for liturgy, for ceremonial reading, for interpretation. And clearly in Ethiopia, and implicitly in the textual artifacts of late antique Egypt, those literate specialists

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der Vliet, "Literature, Liturgy, Magic: A Dynamic Continuum," in *Christianity in Egypt: Literary Production and Intellectual Trends: Studies in Honor of Tito Orlandi*, ed. Paula Buzi and Alberto Camplani (Rome: Institutum Patristicum Augustinianum, 2011), 555–74.

32 Allan Young, "Magic as a 'Quasi-Profession': The Organization of Magic and Magical Healing Among Amhara," *Ethnology* 14 (1975): 245–65; Jacques Mercier, *Ethiopian Magical Scrolls*, trans. Richard Pevear (New York: Braziller, 1979); Mercier, *Art that Heals: The Image as Medicine in Ethiopia* (New York: Museum for African Art, 1997); Kay Kaufman Shelemay, "The Musician and Transmission of Religious Tradition: The Multiple Roles of the Ethiopian Däbtära," *Journal of Religion in Africa* 22 (1992): 242–60; Steven Kaplan, "Magic and Religion in Christian Ethiopia: Some Preliminary Remarks," *Studia Aethiopica: In Honour of Siegbert Uhlig on Occasion of His 65th Birthday*, ed. Verena Boll et al. (Wiesbaden: Harrasowitz, 2004), 413–20; Kaplan, "Däbtära," *Encyclopaedia Aethiopica*, ed. Siegbert Uhlig (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2005), 2:53–54.

functioned also to extend the authority of institution and book to the everyday needs of clients.

By reference to the *däbtära*, in fact, we might fill out the model of the literate expert not only as an ecclesiastical role but as a dynamic religious/social *context* for the production of Christian culture. The scribal expert functions amidst a complex bustle of consultation, synthesis, ritual innovation, and text-production that was most typically located at saints' shrines and monastic *laura*s, where many Coptic magical texts have been found. As a world of creative production and performance that revolved around text, the world of the scribal ritual expert was one of the key sites in which Christianity was *produced* in the landscape – not as an ahistorical orthodox system but as a religion, perpetually negotiated in various social sites on the basis of needs, traditions, and ritual exigencies. Like magical texts, the *sortes* books functioned as ritual compositions, implying performative situations in which the efforts of client, scribe, and verbal formulas came to be worked out in textual form. Notions of the intrinsic power of liturgical formula or the mantic potential of church or shrine spaces fed into the authority of these texts, but only in the dynamic setting of the person of a ritual expert. The very miniature size of the codex with Gospel of the Lots of Mary, for example, served to shift authority from the book itself to the person who wielded the book.[33]

2 Scribal Worlds and Ritual Texts

A second dimension of the production of ritual materials in late antique Egypt concerns the *internal scribal culture* of Coptic writing and book. By late antiquity this culture was affiliated closely with church and monastery and probably extended to a number of social contexts and interests, from copying sermons and miracles to composing ever new apocryphal revelations of heaven and afterlife. This scribal culture allowed much overlap between the composers of magical and divination texts and the copyists of (for example) gospels.[34] The focus here, however, will be those scribal subcultures that produced magical texts; and this type of ritually-oriented composition brings us back to the Ethiopian *däbtära*.

33 AnneMarie Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles? The Gospel of the Lots of Mary* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014), 51–56.

34 Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 238–64; Peter van Minnen, "Boorish or Bookish? Literature in Egyptian Villages in the Fayum in the Graeco-Roman Period," *JJP* 27 (1998): 108–14.

*Däbtära*s are distinctive in Ethiopian society for their scribal and liturgical training, to be sure, but they carry a strong financial incentive towards versatility with that training.[35] Out of this versatility with writing and chant have developed various subcultures of *däbtära*s, circulating discrete corpora of amulets and spells, manuals for their composition, formulations of magical words and names, and local traditions of demons and angels. Most interestingly, these subcultures have typically cultivated a mystery and esotericism around their books, spells, and utterances, both to construct efficacy and to establish boundaries from the laity. Thus *däbtära*s have developed a veritable *culture* of magical innovation out of their ecclesiastical and scribal training. Can this kind of discrete scribal culture in modern Ethiopia inform our reconstruction of scribal subcultures and ritual expertise in late antique Egypt?

We have seen how *sortes* books, like magical spells and amulets, represent the innovations – the crafts – of trained personnel who claimed some affiliation to the authority of Scripture, liturgy, and the Christian institution. They are artifacts of the Egyptianizing of Christianity and point to a type of agent conversant in the broader culture and its local traditions as well as eclectic in his sense of, and facility with, writing.[36] What might scribes, then, have imagined themselves doing in comparing, collecting, and editing such materials as amulets, curse spells, charm-remedies, and divination procedures? What mandates and practices informed their cultural worlds?

2.1 *Concepts of the Book*

We might consider first how the medium of the codex itself invited (and also reflected) an eclecticism in literary and authoritative genres, whether in combining a couple of biblical psalms with a Pauline epistle and an apocryphal apocalypse, a series of revelatory gospels, an ancient hymn for the Nile surge with some psalms and a creed (P.Lond.Lit. 239), or a group of angelic lists and magical invocations. The codex offered the perfect embodiment of that esoteric book culture that developed throughout the Graeco-Roman Mediterranean and Near East, emphasizing authoritative pedigrees (to Adam, Zoroaster, Mithras, or the august priest Astrampsychos) and authoritative genres such as apocalypse, dream narrative, mantic guides to dream interpretation, and ritual formulary. The Nag Hammadi Library is one of the best examples of

35 On liturgical training of *däbtära*s, see Shelemay, "The Musician and Transmission of Religious Tradition"; Mercier, *Art that Heals*, 43–44.

36 See now Scott Bucking, *Practice Makes Perfect: P.Cotsen-Princeton 1 and the Training of Scribes in Byzantine Egypt* (Los Angeles: Cotsen Occasional Press, 2011); with David Frankfurter, "Books, Lists, and Scribes in Christian Egypt," *JRA* 26 (2013): 929–32.

Christian scribes' special attention to authoritative names, genre titles, and textual grouping, its late antique monastic editors drawing precisely on this eclectic world of mysterious books real and imagined.[37] But the various divination books also show an important development of this attention to authority and even the development of new genres by virtue of the codex form: in William Klingshirn's words, "an effort to assemble the ingredients of a written discipline" out of traditional ritual gestures one might find enacted at a shrine, such as lot divination, incubation, or cursing.[38] This is not so much a 'privatization' of textuality as a new eclecticism in the concept of how a text might function.[39] We might then speak of scribal culture in terms of its inclination to systematize mantic or magical elements of an oral-performative culture (even that of a shrine) now in book form – not so much to preempt that oral-performative culture as to give the book its own kind of authority in the world, whether for portability or to augment the equipment or general potency of a shrine.

2.2 *Idiosyncrasies of Collecting and Copying*

The evidence for the production of sacred books in late Roman Egypt itself reveals less the work of supervised 'scriptoria' and more an idiosyncratic enterprise involving limited networks of monks, craftsmen, and local providers of material (leather, papyrus, wood, etc.). Borrowing a master-text, procuring the writing materials, copying particular selections of literature, and binding the results involved individual efforts and choices at every stage, with no official oversight (and a great range in literacy and types of text-ownership).[40]

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37 David Frankfurter, "The Legacy of the Jewish Apocalypse in Early Christian Communities: Two Regional Trajectories," in *The Jewish Apocalyptic Heritage in Early Christianity*, ed. James C. VanderKam and William Adler, Corpus rerum iudaicarum ad Novum Testamentum 3, Jewish Traditions in Early Christian Literature 4 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 150–62; and now Hugo Lundhaug and Lance Jenott, *The Monastic Origins of the Nag Hammadi Codices*, STAC 97 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2015), esp. ch. 6.

38 Klingshirn, "Inventing the *sortilegus*," 157.

39 Compare Roger Bagnall, *Early Christian Books in Egypt* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009), 81–87; and now Torallas Tovar, "A New Sahidic Coptic Fragment," on the possible use of *Ap. Patr.* for divination.

40 On the scriptorium model see Alan Mugridge, "What Is a Scriptorium?" *Proceedings of the 24th International Congress of Papyrology. Helsinki, 1–7 August 2004*, ed. Jaakko Frösén, Tiina Purola, and Erja Salmenkivi (Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 2007), 2:781–92. On reconsidering the social context of literary production in late antique Egypt see H. E. Winlock and W. E. Crum, *The Monastery of Epiphanius at Thebes* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1926), 2:193–95; Ewa Wipszycka, "Le degré d'alphabétisation en Égypte byzantine," *REAug* 30 (1984): 79–96; Chrysi Kotsifou, "Books and Book Production in the Monastic Communities of Byzantine Egypt," in *The Early Christian*

The agency in copying (and, presumably, in expanding) texts lay with the individual scribe, his acquaintance with liturgical and folklore traditions, and the authority with which he regarded his techniques. Orders might come to develop a liturgy or processional text, or to compile miracles or visions under an authoritative name. A typical exhortation to the potential copyist reads, "whoever shall write (ⲛⲉⲧ ⲛⲁⲥϩⲁⲓ) the book of (the main character's) martyrdom, I (Christ) will write his name in the Book of Life," indicating at least a modicum of ritualization or sanctity to the effort of copying.[41] At the same time, evidence of multiple scribes in individual codices or caches of magical texts shows that the idiosyncrasy of copying and editing might easily extend to a small group of scribes over time.[42] As individualized as it could be, Coptic scribality seems also to have involved community or shrine interests as well as subcultures of esoteric traditions explored and exchanged, much like that of the *däbtära*, out of a sense of the power and authority of the written word and its collecting potential. Writing and the capacity to inscribe traditions amounted to a technology that scribes deployed to mediate the charismatic symbols and lore of church or monastery into Egyptian culture.

2.3 *From Apocalypse to Liturgy and Magical Incantation*

It is both this esoteric subculture and the fundamental independence of scribes that explains the range of authoritative texts that were copied and composed in late antique Egypt: from ritual manuals and divination texts to apocryphal books and visions.

Instead of the diminishment of apocryphal texts in favor of the biblical canon that Bishop Athanasius proposed in 367, the manuscript and papyrus

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Book, ed. William E. Klingshirn and Linda Safran (Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 2007), 48–66; Kotsifou, "Bookbinding and Manuscript Illumination in Late Antique and Early Medieval Monastic Circles in Egypt," in *Eastern Christians and Their Written Heritage: Manuscripts, Scribes, and Context*, ed. Juan Pedro Monferrer-Sala, Herman Teule, and Sofia Torallas Tovar, Eastern Christian Studies 14 (Leuven: Peeters, 2012), 213–44. Compare Kim Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters: Literacy, Power, and the Transmitters of Early Christian Literature* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2000), regarding second and third-century Christian scribal contexts.

41 Martyrdom of Paese and Thekla (Pierpont Morgan Codex M591, p. 85v, ii), ed. E. A. E. Reymond and J. W. B. Barns, *Four Martyrdoms from the Pierpont Morgan Coptic Codices* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 76, 182. In general on scribal exhortations see Violet MacDermot, *The Cult of the Seer in the Ancient Middle East* (London: Wellcome Institute of the History of Medicine, 1971), 677–82.

42 E.g., Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, no. 133 and p. 295 for discussion. See also William H. Worrell, "Coptic Wizard's Hoard," *AJSL* 46 (1929–1930): 239–62; Paul Mirecki, "The Coptic Wizard's Hoard," *HTR* 87 (1994): 435–60, esp. 437–39. Compare Haines-Eitzen, *Guardians of Letters*, 96–104, on multiple scribes in one manuscript.

evidence shows an increasing interest, from the fourth century on, in extra-canonical, especially apocalyptic writings.[43] By the fifth, sixth, and subsequent centuries, despite complaints by figures such as Shenoute of Atripe and John of Parallos, monastery libraries and codices had become quite eclectic, including new pseudepigrapha and new apocalyptic and visionary compositions.[44] Monastic church painting also shows a preoccupation with visions, eschatology, angelology, and demonology in monastic culture that is clearly conversant with apocalyptic literature.[45] One begins to gather that the reading, imaginative, and liturgical lives of monks in Egypt went well beyond biblical Scripture and in fact emphasized esoteric lore of apocalyptic visions, angels, and heavenly liturgies. And it seems increasingly likely that the Coptic magical texts, most of which employ esoteric elements associated with liturgy, represent monks' applications of these apocalyptic traditions.[46]

The Christian scribe thus emerges as not just a copyist but one who has mastered the extraction of magical words, symbols, and chants from apocalyptic books for performative use – a scribe who specializes in the efficacious word.[47] This is what we see in the Rossi tractate, a twenty-one page exorcistic incantation, with its invocations of:

> Michael, the one who is over all the strong powers,
> Raphael, the one who is over salvation,
> Gabriel, the one who is over the powers,
> Arnael, the one who is over hearing,
> Uriel, the one who is over the crowns,
> Nephael, the one who is over aid,
> Akentael, the one who is over the stars,

43 See Thomas J. Kraus, "The Lending of Books in the Fourth Century C.E. P.Oxy LXIII 4365 – A Letter on Papyrus and the Reciprocal Lending of Literature Having Become Apocryphal," in *Ad Fontes: Original Manuscripts and Their Significance for Studying Early Christianity – Selected Essays* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 185–206; Daniel Stökl Ben Ezra, "Canonization – a Non-Linear Process? Observing the Process of Canonization through the Christian (and Jewish) Papyri from Egypt," *ZAC* 12 (2008): 193–214.

44 See Winlock and Crum, *Monastery of Epiphanius*, 1:197–208; Frankfurter, "Legacy of the Jewish Apocalypse," 150–200. Complaints about extra-canonical works: Orlandi, "A Catechesis Against Apocryphal Texts"; and Arnold van Lantschoot, "Fragments coptes d'une homélie de Jean de Parallos contre les livres hérétiques," *Miscellanea Giovanni Mercati*, Studi e testi 121–26 (Vatican City, 1946), 1:296–326.

45 E.g., C. C. Walters, "Christian Paintings from Tebtunis," *JEA* 75 (1989): 191–208.

46 Jacques van der Vliet, "The Coptic Gnostic Texts as Christian Apocryphal Literature," *Ägypten und Nubien in spätantiker und christlicher Zeit. Akten des 6. Internationalen Koptologenkongresses, Münster, 20–26. Juli 1996*, ed. Stephen Emmel et al. (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 1999), 2:553–62.

47 See esp. Mercier, *Art that Heals*, 46–59.

Asentael, the one who is over the sun,
Eraphael, the one who is over the day …
Andonael, the one who is over the coming in of the Father and his going forth,
Spell,
that you (pl.) may come to me, stand with me, and cast from before my face every unclean spirit.
Let them all withdraw from before my face, lest they say, Where is his God?
Let them all tremble and flee from my presence,
in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, AAAAAAAAAA
Holy, holy, holy is the Lord Sabaoth!
Heaven and earth are full of your [holy glory]!
We glorify you, we glorify all your holinesses, Yao.
We glorify you, holy one, Sabaoth, the first of heaven and earth.
We glorify you, Adonai Eloei almighty, the first of the cherubim and the seraphim.
We glorify you, Marmaraoth, the one who is before the angels and the archangels.
We glorify you, Chamarmariao, the one who is before the fourteen firmaments.
We glorify you, Thrakai, the one who has arrayed the earth upon the abyss and has hung [the heaven] as a vault.
We glorify you, Manachoth, the one who has laid the foundation of heaven and earth and has established the fourteen firmaments upon the fourteen pillars….
Listen to me!
Come to me, good Gabriel,
so that you may listen to me today,
on account of the seal of Adonai, the Father, and the fourteen amulets that are in my right hand,
that you may come to me at this place and become for me a patron, minister, and help all the days of my life.
… cast out every evil and unclean spirit, whether male or female, whether heavenly or of the earth or of the air.
They must not be able to stand in my presence
nor in the presence of your great might, God.
Amen (x3).[48]

48 Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, no. 71 (Rossi tractate, pp. 2–6). See Marvin W. Meyer, *Rossi's 'Gnostic' Tractate*, Occasional Papers 13 (Claremont, CA: Institute for Antiquity and Christianity, 1988).

It is difficult to envision the precise location for intoning this protracted exorcism (home? monastery? courtyard?), but we can clearly see the editor's control of liturgical speech and of the secret angelic names and attributes associated with apocalyptic tradition, as well as the flexibility with which he regarded liturgical and apocalyptic traditions.[49] It thus exemplifies the creative agency of scribal experts in developing and inscribing ritual procedures *on the basis of* internal traditions drawn from the world of apocalyptic reading, editing, and composition.

Another feature of the Coptic spells that come from the monastic and liturgical cultures of Egyptian Christianity is an interest in the demons of Amente – the 'west' or underworld – in ways that seem to go beyond the liturgical imagination and even to recall earlier (pre-Christian) mortuary literature such as the Book of the Dead and the Book of Gates. But how would monastic scribes have been able to recall such traditions? On the surface, at least, their depictions of Amente demons developed traditions from Jewish apocalyptic texts about the underworld, its demonology, and aspects of the mortuary process: texts such as the *Apocalypse of Zephaniah*, the *Testament of Abraham*, and the *Book of the Secrets of Enoch* (*2 Enoch*), all represented among late antique Greek and Coptic manuscripts from Egypt.[50] But in their development of sermons, martyrologies, and apocrypha, monastic scribes elaborated on these traditions with unusual creativity: the specific names and functions of mortuary demons; the nature of Abbadon, chief angel of Amente;[51] and the cosmic accessibility of these Amente demons, which were vicious but could also be potential instruments of just vengeance.[52] A curse against perjurers calls upon the archangel Raphael to bring up Temeluchos (chief torturer of Hell in the second-century *Apocalypse of Peter*) "to afflict

49 Compare Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, no. 134 = Anastasy 9,1–2 (discussed below), a domestic exorcism of twenty codex pages.

50 Martha Himmelfarb, *Tours of Hell: An Apocalyptic Form in Jewish and Christian Literature* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1983); Richard Bauckham, *The Fate of the Dead: Studies on the Jewish and Christian Apocalypses* (Leiden: Brill, 1998), esp. 221–26.

51 E.g., T. Ab. 17; Pistis Sophia 3.126–27; *Apoc. Paul* (NHC V,2) 20–23; Reymond and Barns, *Coptic Martyrdoms*, 102–3, 203; E. A. Wallis Budge, *Coptic Apocrypha in the Dialect of Upper Egypt* (London: British Museum, 1913), 179–215, 326–30. Compare also the iconography of Amente in a tenth-century Fayyum church: Walters, "Christian Paintings from Tebtunis," esp. 200–4.

52 Jan Zandee, *Death as an Enemy According to Egyptian Conceptions* (Leiden: Brill, 1960); David Frankfurter, "Demon Invocations in the Coptic Magic Spells," *Actes du huitième congrès international d'études coptes*, ed. Nathalie Bosson and Anne Boud'hors (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 2:453–66; Frankfurter, "Amente Demons and Christian Syncretism," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 14 (2012): 83–101.

quickly [my accuser] with what a demon deserves, and with error, trouble, and madness."[53] Another curse invokes "Sourochchata, you who are strong in your power, who brings the rocks to dissolution: let my voice come to you! You who dissolve the sinews and the ligaments and the joints, you are to dissolve the sinews of N. for all time."[54] Or, for a childbirth incantation, a ritual specialist well-versed in liturgical angelology calls upon a series of angels and underworld beings to stand company alongside the woman, including "Tartarouchos of Amente, the ringlets of whose hair stretch out over the whole world, whose name is Sisinaei, Amin, that you come to me, to (this side). I invoke you, Espaerte, daughter of the devil, who leaped down to Amente (and) brought Tartarouchos of Amente up, that you come to me, to (this side)."[55]

In these invocations and descriptions we can certainly see a verbal creativity with the materials of apocalyptic tradition, but we can also recognize an adherence to archaic mythological traditions that must somehow have circulated in scribal milieux. Such traditions, as we still see them in mortuary literature of the early Roman period, may well have motivated monks' interests in apocalyptic texts and creativity in elaborating a mythology of Amente in various compositions, even though the monks could in no way rely on Egyptian texts or institutions as resources.[56] How then to comprehend these mythological traditions? Again, the recollection of a mortuary demonology – an elaborate liminal realm of monstrous spirits whose functions lay in the physical

53 Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, no. 92, lines 21–24.

54 Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, no. 111 (Berlin inv. 832, ed. Walter Beltz, "Die koptischen Zauberpapyri der Papyrus-Sammlung der Staatlichen Museen zu Berlin" *AfP* 29 [1983]: 59–86); compare no. 79b (Pap.Congr. XI, pp. 172–73), an erotic spell: "KOK KOCHAROTOCH PARSOBOL ANAEL I asked him and he sent a demon whose name is Theumatha whose head is in the abyss, whose feet are in Amente, the Gehenna of fire. He took fiery tongs; He will afflict the head of N daughter of N, until she comes to me, wherever I want. She will draw her robe to her neck, and she will call out to me, 'Come here!'" (tr. Frankfurter from *Ancient Christian Magic*, p. 167).

55 Trans. adjusted from Meyer and Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic*, no. 66, pp. 126–27 (Michigan inv. 1190, col. 2, ed. William H. Worrell, "Coptic Magical and Medical Texts," *Orientalia* 4 [1935]: 8–15). Both Worrell and Skiles in *Ancient Christian Magic* translate Tartarouchos as "keeper of"; I have kept it as a name since it referred to a particular underworld demon.

56 On the character of Egyptian mortuary texts see, e.g., Mark Smith, *Traversing Eternity: Texts for the Afterlife from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), esp. 460, 625; Rita Lucarelli, "The Guardian-Demons of the Book of the Dead," *British Museum Studies in Ancient Egypt and Sudan* 15 (2010): 85–102; Lucarelli, "Demonology during the Late Pharaonic and Greco-Roman Periods in Egypt," *JANER* 11 (2011): 109–125; Martin Andreas Stadler, "Funerary Religion: The Final Phase of an Egyptian Religion," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, ed. Christina Riggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 383–93.

processing or annihilation of souls – seems to have been interconnected with the scribal enterprise itself: the act of writing. To embark on the description of demons, or death, as a Christian monk, we might say, opened up archaic traditions associated with those in earlier Egyptian literature – habitus and habit-memories embedded in the scribal role.[57]

Thus the internal scribal culture of Egyptian Christianity involved not just a rich interaction with apocryphal texts and liturgical hybrids like the Rossi tractate, but also traditions of elaboration and mythological interest in mortuary demonology that arose with scribal creativity. The incorporation of these literary traditions must be considered alongside technological traditions of writing like the ticket oracle and the *sortes* book. Altogether we find that writing in late antique Egyptian monastic milieux was itself a syncretistic endeavor, developing and deploying the codex, the list, the blessing, the query, and the magically-loaded names and qualities of supernatural beings as a concrete expression of Christianity.

3 Conclusion

By focusing on specific milieux of scribal ritual experts and their particular interests in esotericism, names and lists, the mystique of books, and the power of the scripture-based utterance, we can gain a more precise sense of the development of divination and magical texts – sometimes in relationship to pre-Christian Egyptian traditions – and the agency involved in this development. The inner culture of the Ethiopian *däbtära* offers a credible comparative model for the kind of scribal world that might develop *sortes* books and magical texts out of the formulas of church liturgy, the language of Scripture, and the details of apocalypses. We gain a sense of the subculture in which scribes might, for example, revitalize the ticket oracle as a sensible means of communicating God's will at a saint's shrine, or repackage textual divination as a *sortes* ritual, or maintain traditions like Amente demonology as a pronounced scribal, narrative interest and resource for magical applications. At the same time, the currency of the traditions of ticket oracles at so many regional saints' shrines should remind us that, however we model or locate the social world of the scribal expert, it was thoroughly in continuity with Egyptian ecclesiastical and monastic culture. And the extensive prehistory of the ticket oracle, back to New Kingdom Egypt, must not be admired on its own, as some inevitable and timeless survival. We can only conceptualize the

57 See further Frankfurter, "Amente Demons and Christian Syncretism."

antiquity of this practice in the context of the tickets' adamantly Christian, even ostentatiously monotheizing features. These features do not reflect some kind of proto-Salafi monolatry but rather an instructive practice of inscribing oracle tickets (and *sortes* interpretations), perhaps out of a general commitment to clarify the hierarchy of the Christian pantheon, perhaps at the behest of a scribe or bishop anxious about divination's place at the shrine.[58]

But the *sortes* books and the magical texts themselves may best be placed in scribal milieux that also sought to mystify the public perception of the codex, the written word, and the scribal expert. Divination, as the ritually controlled introduction of some religious or cosmic system to function as guidance in everyday affairs, is perhaps the most basic ritual arena in the history of religions. The canon itself, David Brakke has perceptively argued, was promoted in the mid-fourth century as a kind of restricted divination source, delimiting a scriptural framework for God's messages and their authoritative interpreters.[59] Self-contained divination books like the *sortes sanctorum* and the *sortes patriarchorum* were extensions of the same idea. The sacred, or sacred-appearing or -sounding, codices of Christianity mediated authoritative words that, under ritually constrained circumstances, could guide decisions. Each of these books implied ritual experts, agents in their compilation and use, and each inevitably implied *place*, for in Christian Egypt divination inevitably articulated the holiness of saints' shrines. The production of the Sortes books was thus a natural extension of Christian book culture, scriptural culture, and ritual culture.

58 Geneviève Husson, "Les questions oraculaires chrétiennes d'Égypte: Continuités et changements," in Kramer et al., *Akten des 21. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1997), 482–89.

59 David Brakke, "Canon Formation and Social Conflict in Fourth-Century Egypt: Athanasius of Alexandria's Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter," *HTR* 87 (1994): 395–419; Brakke, "A New Fragment of Athanasius's Thirty-Ninth Festal Letter: Heresy, Apocrypha, and the Canon," *HTR* 103 (2010): 47–66.

CHAPTER 11

Sortilege between Divine Ordeals and "Secular" Justice: Aspects of Jurisdiction in (Ritual) Texts from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt

Franziska Naether[1]

In this chapter, I show that the Sortes Astrampsychi and related lot and ticket oracles from Graeco-Roman Egypt quite frequently allude to legal issues or concrete acts of judicial life. I conclude that people asked oracles for help in legal matters, or, put differently, that the oracles formed part of the Egyptian system(s) of justice. I place this aspect of the Sortes Astrampsychi in context by discussing a selection of text types such as oracles, temple oaths, and amulet decrees dating back as far as the New Kingdom (1550 BCE) and argue that we need to interpret these texts in two ways: as texts of ritual practices and as texts of Egyptian/Ptolemaic/Roman Imperial law. I present case studies from ritual texts of Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt in Greek and Demotic where practitioners, mainly qualified temple personnel, acted as intermediates between humans and gods to find solutions in certain legal matters.

The questions and answers in a Greek lot oracle, the Sortes Astrampsychi, form the starting point of this chapter. The focus of interest will lay in situations which required divine instead of 'secular' justice and in the texts (sometimes based on sortition) which lead to judgments and the ritual experts, *sortilegi*, who guided these processes. This also means the *sortilegus* had to be competent in religious and juristic issues. Additionally, I address the following question: Could one regard aspects of jurisdiction as 'secularized' in a society with highly intertwined rituals, a sacralized world order (Ma'at) and a divine king? My contribution concludes with an analysis of this discourse and its applicability for ancient studies.

1 I express my sincere thanks to AnneMarie Luijendijk and Bill Klingshirn for organizing this formidable symposium as well as to all contributors and participants for their input. It was very impressive to see how research on *sortes* continues. Abbreviations of papyrological works are cited after the "Checklist of Greek, Latin, Demotic and Coptic Papyri, Ostraca and Tablets," edited by edited by John F. Oates et al. (http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/papyrus/texts/clist.html). Some texts have been accessed via the Thesaurus Lingua Aegyptia (http://aaew.bbaw.de/tla/), the Papyrological Navigator (http://papyri.info/), and the Trismegistos database (http://www.trismegistos.org). All websites have been accessed on March 1, 2017.

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1 The Sortes Astrampsychi

The Sortes Astrampsychi gives important insights into the social, economic and religious life of Roman Egypt. Here I will show that it also was consulted to solve legal situations. The text consists of ninety-two questions, with ten answers assigned to each question, and fake answers composed due to the structure of the oracle. The manuscript tradition comprises thirteen papyrus fragments dating from the late second/early third to fifth century CE, and sixteen medieval manuscripts.[2] This makes the Sortes Astrampsychi the best-preserved lot oracle from the ancient world. While the more recent manuscripts contain the complete text, the ancient sources preserve only sections in several variations of the text. The discovery of more fragments in archives worldwide and excavation sites in Egypt is possible and probable.

While the Sortes Astrampsychi is written in Greek, there are similar examples from the same text type in Egyptian languages and scripts (hieratic, demotic, Coptic), as we will see below. I compare these with the Sortes Astrampsychi to prove that divinatory practices based on sortition played a major role in Egyptian religious life at least from the New Kingdom (though probably earlier) until the Arab period (1550 BCE–641 CE). New texts keep emerging: other contributions in this volume present some and colleagues have brought additional manuscripts to my attention.[3] Furthermore, *sortes* books have a history in other cultures, with direct links from antiquity to the early modern periods with texts preserved in European languages. More and more divinatory techniques known from Greek and Latin historiographers can be retraced now to Graeco-Roman Egypt, such as an omen book on a gecko (giving the meaning when the reptile falls on certain parts of the body)[4] and prognostications on form and look of the human body (physiognomancy).[5] Salvatore Costanza

2 Franziska Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, ORA 3 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 76–82.

3 To my knowledge, there is ongoing research about sortes by the following colleagues: Joachim F. Quack (Heidelberg) about hieratic and demotic texts, some already mentioned in Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 347–49; Allegra Iafrate (Milan/Oxford) on the Sortes Regis Amalrici; Nancy Duval (Montreal) on the Sortes Homericae; and Christa Tuczay (Vienna) about medieval lot oracles.

4 Karl-Theodor Zauzich, "Das demotische 'Buch des Geckos' und die Palmomantik des Melampus," in *Forschung in der Papyrussammlung. Eine Festgabe für das Neue Museum*, ed. Verena M. Lepper, Ägyptische und Orientalische Papyri und Handschriften des Ägyptischen Museums und Papyrussammlung Berlin 1 (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2012), 355–73.

5 The edition of a demotic papyrus from Tebtunis in the Carlsberg Collection, Copenhagen, is currently under preparation by Kim Ryholt.

found papyrological evidence for hepatoscopy whose existence had been deemed probable, though necessarily speculative, until his discovery.[6]

2 Jurisdiction in the Sortes Astrampsychi[7]

The questions in the Sortes Astrampsychi reflect many aspects of daily life. In an earlier analysis of this lot oracle, I identified fifteen categories. The most prominently featured themes are inquiries about increase of property and wealth, about love and marriage, and about a professional career. For the present topic, it is of interest that five questions also pertain to juridical matters:

> 28 εἰ δώσω τοὺς λόγους μου ἄρτι; Will I soon give an accounting?
> 29 εἰ σώζομαι κατηγορούμενος; Am I safe from prosecution?
> 51 εἰ νικήσω ἣν ἔχω δίκην; Will I win my case?
> 63 εἰ νικήσω τὸν ἀντίδικον; Will I win against my opponent in the trial?
> 69 εἰ θεὶς παραβόλιον νικήσω; Will I win if I put down a deposit for an appeal?[8]

There are additional questions touching upon juristic issues (such as marriage, divorce or matters of inheritance which required contracts) that I have sorted under other categories due to their content. Apart from question 51, which is more general, these questions address specific situations referring to trial, appeal, complaint, and defendant.[9] From this variety, petitioners could choose a question perfectly suited to their situation at the time of consulting the oracle. Additionally, a mantic specialist, in Egypt usually a priest, acted as an intermediate to help find the right question, execute the procedure of sortition, and interpret the god-given answer. Through this mediation, petitioners were able to obtain divine help in their individual situation.

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6 See his contribution in this volume.

7 See also Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 256–59.

8 Trans. Randall A. Stewart and Kenneth Morell, "The Oracles of Astrampsychus," in *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature*, ed. William Hansen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 291–324 (modified).

9 These judicial termini represent complex structures, see Sandra L. Lippert, *Einführung in die altägyptische Rechtsgeschichte*, Einführungen und Quellentexte zur Ägyptologie 5 (Münster: LIT 2008). For the answers to these questions, see Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 257–59.

3 Justice and Law in Ancient Egypt

By facilitating legal decisions, the Sortes Astrampsychi stands in a long history in ancient Egypt of jurisdiction by oracles. As I will show in this section, this practice is attested in different periods, languages and text types, and in royal politics as well as in private matters. Ancient Egyptian oracle questions on ostraca and papyrus slips, so-called ticket oracles, contain questions to the gods with a plea for help in juristic matters as well.[10]

In ancient Egypt, a place of jurisdiction was the *premit*. When the pharaoh or the *praefectus Aegypti* visited a town, that is where he answered the petitions of locals. This was the northern gate of the local main temple, a highly religious place where usually only priests and other inaugurated staff were allowed to enter the *dromos* and the sanctuary to meet the gods. Temple oaths were also delivered there. This location represented a fusion of the official law, spoken and executed by the pharaoh or prefect, or his stand-in, and the realm of divine law, represented by the divinities of the temples where the administration of justice took place.[11]

In ancient Egypt, as in many societies, religion leavened nearly all aspects of life. The divine world order, and within that, the law (*hp*), was personified by a goddess with a characteristic feather, Ma'at (*M3ʿ.t*).[12] This creative power

10 The eminence and precision of this subject led me to the idea that the Graeco-Roman ticket oracles might have had a place in Ptolemaic and Roman law. Were they part of divine justice in some way? And if yes, how was that divine justice intertwined with Egyptian/Ptolemaic/Roman imperial law? Further study proved this could not be verified due to the lack of sources and metatexts or hints in the texts themselves. See Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 390–94.

11 Jan Quaegebeur, "La justice à la porte des temples et le toponyme Premit," in *Individu, société et spiritualité dans l'Egypte pharaonique et copte. Mélanges égyptologiques offerts à Prof. Aristide Théodoridès*, ed. Christophe Cannuyer and Jean-Marie Kruchten (Athens: Association Montoise d'Égyptologie, 1995), 201–20; Serge Sauneron, "La justice à la porte des temples (à propos d'un nom égyptien des Propylées)," *BIFAO* 54 (1954): 117–27.

12 Sandra L. Lippert, "Law (Definitions and Codification)," in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, ed. Elizabeth Frood and Willeke Wendrich (Los Angeles, 2012), 2 (http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz002bzzgj): "only a comparatively small aspect of *maat* is concerned with what we would call 'legal justice.'" For Ma'at in general, see Jan Assmann, *Ma'at: Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten* (München: Beck, 1991); Assmann, "Königsdogma und Heilserwartung: Politische und kultische Chaosbeschreibungen in ägyptischen Texten," in *Apocalypticism in the Mediterranean World and the Near East: Proceedings of the International Colloquium on Apocalypticism, Uppsala, August 12–17, 1979*, ed. David Hellholm (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1983), 345–77. Hans-W. Fischer-Elfert offers case studies of individuals outside this norm in *Abseits von Ma'at. Fallstudien zu Außenseitern im Alten Ägypten*. Wahrnehmungen und Spuren Altägyptens: Kulturgeschichtliche Beträge zur Ägyptologie 1 (Würzburg: Ergon, 2005).

and political force had to be achieved daily through rituals with the pharaoh serving as the representative of the gods on earth and the vizier as the 'prophet of Ma'at.' Ma'at is a complex system of ethics and 'truth,' also in a juristic sense. Ma'at worked together with Heka (*Hq3*), 'Magic,' against Isfet (*Isf.t*), 'Disorder' or 'Chaos.' All three are integrated in Egyptian cosmology.[13] According to the Egyptian conception of the afterlife, the deceased had to undergo a trial in which the heart was weighed against the Ma'at feather. Only if the scales were in balance, access to the netherworld would be granted. Otherwise, the deceased had to suffer a second death by being eaten by a demonic creature. Many vignettes in papyri of the Book of the Dead feature the scene of the weighing.[14] Divine justice, it appears, is connected to a key rite of passage in the Egyptian belief system. The same is true of the festive events that are part of the calendar: The overview of days, months and seasons served as an orientation to time and natural phenomena, but was in the first place a calendar of festivals for putting Ma'at into practice.[15]

The Egyptians attributed Ma'at and jurisdiction to the god Thoth.[16] The Egyptian king as supreme judge and his viziers and other representatives took care of people's actions and compliance with the law. Before the Persian invasion of Egypt, codified law did not exist, and trials were solved by casuistic law and norms. Only sporadic references to laws in Egyptian literary texts have been preserved, such as teachings, Greek historiographic accounts, or

13 For an overview of the perception of Ma'at, creation, and a conception of laws of nature, see Franziska Naether, "Naturgesetze und göttliche Justiz in Ägypten: zwei Pole einer Betrachtung," in *Laws of Heaven – Laws of Nature: Himmelsgesetze – Naturgesetze. Legal Interpretations of Cosmic Phenomena in the Ancient World – Rechtsförmige Interpretationen kosmischer Phänomene in der antiken Welt*, ed. Konrad Schmid and Christoph Uehlinger, Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis 267 (Fribourg: Academic Press, 2016), 52–70.

14 Thomas George Allen, *The Book of the Dead or Going Forth by Day: Ideas of the Ancient Egyptians Concerning the Hereafter as Expressed in Their Own Terms*. SAOC 37 (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974).

15 As examples, see hemerologies (calendars of lucky and unlucky days as featured in the Sortes Astrampsychi) and the prognostic calendar of the Naos of the Decades in Franziska Naether and Micah Ross, "Interlude: A Series containing a Hemerology with Lengths of Daylight," *Egitto e Vicino Oriente* 31 (2008): 52–91; Anne-Sophie von Bomhard, *The Naos of the Decades. From Observation of the Sky to Mythology and Astrology*. Oxford Centre for Maritime Archaeology Monograph 3 (Oxford: Oxford Centre for Maritime Archaeology, Institute of Archaeology, 2008). Newly edited is a list from Aswan: Friedhelm Hoffmann, "Die Datierung des Ostrakon Brooklyn 12768 1630 und der Kult des Osiris-Espmetis auf Elephantine in römischer Zeit," in *Texte, Theben, Tonfragmente: Festschrift Günter Burkard*, ed. Dieter Kessler et al., ÄAT 76 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2009), 206–13.

16 Lippert, "Law (Definitions and Codification)," 2: *hp* = '(single) law,' 'legal title.'

the 'Instruction for the Vizier' and certain royal decrees.[17] Since documentary texts are highly formalized in layout, formulations, and style, a tendency to normalization can be observed. We lack texts that speak to a history or a philosophy of law in Egypt. Indeed, the first extant account of a collection of laws in Egypt is preserved on a papyrus in the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris (BN 215 verso, columns 6–16, ca. 250–220 BCE). Besides the legal text, the papyrus contains the story of its development, beginning with an order to collect laws addressed to priests, wise men, and military officials of the Persian king Darius I (549–486 BCE).[18] Several later law books from Egypt are attested in Greek and demotic, such as the Codex Hermoupolis, the so-called Zivilprozessordnung (a civil procedure code), the Gnomon of the Idios Logos, and the Corpus Iuris Civilis.[19]

Egypt occupied a special position in the Graeco-Roman period, as it had two legal systems: the indigenous Egyptian law and the Macedonian/Greek and later Latin law.[20] These systems were supplemented, e.g., by decrees such as the famous Rosetta Stone.

17 Lippert, "Law (Definitions and Codification)," 3.

18 Lippert, "Law (Definitions and Codification)," 3; Lippert, "Les codes de lois en Égypte à l'époque perse," in *Codes de lois et lois sacrées: La rédaction et la codification des lois en Grèce et dans l'Israël ancien*, ed. Dominique Jaillard and Christophe Nihan (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, forthcoming); Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 474; Kenneth A. Kitchen and Paul J. N. Lawrence, *Treaty, Law and Covenant in the Ancient Near East* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012).

19 Lippert, "Law (Definitions and Codification)," 8–10 with the known sources, e.g. Schafik Allam, "Réflexions sur le Code légal d'Hermopolis dans l'Égypte ancienne," *CEg* 61 (1986): 50–75; Sandra L. Lippert, *Ein demotisches juristisches Lehrbuch: Untersuchungen zu Papyrus Berlin P 23757 rto*. ÄA 66 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2004); William J. Tait, "P. Carlsberg 236: Another Fragment of a Demotic Legal Manual" in *The Carlsberg Papyri 1: Demotic Texts from the Collection*, ed. John Paul Frandsen. Carsten Niebuhr Institute Publications 15 (Copenhaven: Museum Tusculanums Forlag, 1991), 93–101; Michel Chauveau, "P. Carlsberg 301: Le manuel juridique de Tebtynis," in Frandsen, *The Carlsberg Papyri 1*, 103–27; Alexander Schütze, *Ägypten unter der Herrschaft der Achämeniden. Studien zur Verwaltung und Gesellschaft einer Provinz des Perserreiches* (PhD diss., Universität Leipzig, 2012); Mónica M. Bontty, *Conflict Management in Ancient Egypt: Law as a Social Phenomenon* (PhD diss., University of Michigan).

20 Joseph M. Modrzejewski, *Droit impérial et traditions locales dans l'Égypte romaine*. Collected Studies 321 (Hampshire: Variorum, 1990).

4 Divine Justice

Parallel to the casuistic and, in later periods, canonic law, Egypt also had a divine legislation by which certain matters were decided. Here, divination comes into view again, for it is through divinatory techniques that Egyptians could explore the divine will or knowledge as the highest instance of jurisdiction. The role of the divine in Egyptian justice and its contextualization in Egyptian (social, political) history *à la longue durée* has not yet been examined in detail, apart from remarks and rather pejorative comments which speak of the Graeco-Roman and Byzantine periods as eras of decline. In his 1996 article "Droit et magie," Yvan Koenig presented a preliminary approach to studying divine justice. His conclusion features the important observation that magical practices and actions of law often cannot be distinguished because an important function of Heka was to enable the world order of Ma'at and the protection of the land.[21] Shafik Allam and Joachim Friedrich Quack[22] provided overviews of the topic.[23] Moreover, in Roman religion, such close ties between religion and jurisdiction have been verified as well.[24] Clearly there is a lack of scholarship on this topic; perhaps this is due to the fact that we possess only few facts about divine justice besides the divinatory texts themselves.

Moreover, many historians of law were educated in modern law and therefore consider decisions of gods as an antiquated method on the way to a secular state with separate powers,[25] a way for priests to make money,[26] or as a form of simple-minded personal piety.[27] I concur with Quack, however, that divine judgments had their place in jurisdiction in certain periods, certain

21 Yvan Koenig, "Droit et Magie," in *Égypte pharaonique: pouvoir, société*, ed. Bernadette Menu. Mediterranées 6–7 (Paris: Harmattan, 1996), 157.

22 Joachim Friedrich Quack, "Göttliche Gerechtigkeit und Recht am Beispiel des spätzeitlichen Ägypten," in *Recht und Religion. Menschliche und göttliche Gerechtigkeitsvorstellungen in den Antiken Welten*, ed. Robert Rollinger, Heinz Barta, and Martin Lang, Philippika 24 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2008), 135–53.

23 Schafik Allam, "Gottesgerichtsbarkeit in der altägyptischen Arbeitersiedlung von Deir el-Medineh," *Mitteilungen des Deutschen Archäologischen Instituts Kairo* 24 (1969): 10–15.

24 See the recent volume by O. E. Tellegen-Couperus, *Law and Religion in the Roman Republic* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).

25 E.g., Erwin Seidl called it "eine Verirrung des ägyptischen Rechts in einer Verfallszeit"; Seidel, *Einführung in die ägyptische Rechtsgeschichte bis zum Ende des Neuen Reiches. 1. Juristischer Teil*, Ägyptologische Forschungen 10 (Glückstadt: Augustin, 1939), 38–39.

26 Isidor M. Lurje, *Studien zum altägyptischen Recht des 16. bis 10. Jahrhunderts v.u.Z.*, Forschungen zum Römischen Recht 30 (Weimar: Böhlau, 1971), 120–25.

27 Schafik Allam, "Religiöse Bindungen im Recht und Rechtswirksamkeit in Altägypten," in Rollinger et al., *Recht und Religion*, 120–22. He also postulates that methods of divine justice have been implemented to avoid a breach of laws after a trial.

local contexts and certain cases.[28] It is very probable that people consulted gods in situations of contingency not only to achieve divine assistance or to get to know things which laid beyond their perception, but also to speed up processes. Since the Egyptians considered their gods to be the highest authorities, these gods occupied the highest position in the juristic hierarchy. But we also know of cases where individuals doubted the oracular answer of one god and asked another.[29] Communication between the human and the divine was not a one-way street. A mantic specialist assisting with oracles and a member of the local court could be one and the same person.[30]

The situation raises questions: In which cases was the 'standard' way of jurisdiction 'sufficient,' and in which cases did people consult oracles? Was a divine ordeal more useful and more valid in court than a report of a witness? Our sources on divine law basically involve matters of property, theft and fraud that were decided through the help of divine intervention. An example is a divine decision concerning the right of way. The text (ca. 1539–1077 BCE) reads as follows:

> Year 14, month 1 of the summer season, day 19: The invocation which the man of the workers' group, Pentaweret, had done, of the king Amenhotep on this day: "My good lord! I will not give Hay the (right to use the) way to go in and out (on) this land." (So) he (the god-king Amenhotep) spoke. Then, the god moved behind … (more cases and ordeals and a list of witnesses follow).
>
> Ostracon Cairo inv. 25555[31]

28 Quack, "Göttliche Gerechtigkeit," 139: "Gottesurteile mögen zu manchen Zeiten häufiger als zu anderen sein, aber sie haben immer noch eine Struktur und einen definierten Platz in der Gesellschaft.… Dieser dürfte dort zu sehen sein, wo sonstige Mittel der Wahrheitsfindung nicht mehr greifen."

29 E.g., Papyrus BM EA inv. 10335; see Sandra L. Lippert, "Law Courts," in *UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, ed. Elizabeth Frood and Willeke Wendrich (http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz002djg21).

30 E.g., Petosiris and Padikem in Gilles Gorre, "Les élites sacerdotales d'Hermopolis et le pouvoir gréco-macédonien," in *Elites et pouvoir en Egypte ancienne*, ed. Juan Carlos Moreno Garcia, Cahiers de recherches de l'Institut de Papyrologie et d'Egyptologie de Lille 28 (Lille: Université Charles-de-Gaulle 2009–2010), 364–66.

31 Edition in Jaroslav Černý, *Ostraca hiératiques Nos 25501–25832*, Catalogue général des antiquités égyptiennes du Musée du Caire (Cairo: L'Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, 1935); commentary in Allam, "Gottesgerichtsbarkeit," 13.

For the present discussion, it is important to notice that such cases do not differ from crimes and offences dealt with in courts.[32]

5 Text Types for Divination and Law

Several texts belonging to the realm of cult practices (religion, magic, divination, etc.) use formal, law-like language and pertain to juristic matters in some way, or are part of the official or divine law of Egypt. In this section, I present such text types.

The main oracular processes consisted of the ticket oracle and ordeals of the processional barque.[33] Priests brought the petitioners' questions before the cult statue of the local god for a decision. At this stage, only professional temple personnel were allowed to enter the sanctuary. Each question was put before the divinity either in oral or written form. The preserved ostraca and papyrus tickets show that the questions were presented in a twofold way: in an affirmative and in a negative version. By a movement or technique of sortition, maybe through a medium, the divinity picked one ticket which signified the answer. This piece was then handed back to the petitioner. The versions found in excavations are basically the neglected ones, which have been archived in temples that were later excavated.

The processional oracle works similarly: ostraca with questions or keywords were put in front of the barque containing the god's image in a festival procession on the temple *dromos*. This ritual boat was carried by priestly staff. The god declared his will by movement of the barque and its carriers, such as nodding or withdrawing. These divinatory techniques are attested in Egypt from the New Kingdom/Third Intermediate Period (ca. 1550 BCE onwards) until the Roman period. There was a preference in favor of the ticket oracle in Ptolemaic and Roman times. The written evidence is in hieratic, demotic, Greek and Coptic. Besides these yes/no questions, it was also possible to present the divinity with a list of possibilities such as names of thieves. This method could have been used in oral or written form as well as with the processional barque or the god's statue. Court officials protocolled the decisions. As Sandra Lippert notes, in Deir el-Medina, where most of our textual evidence for these

32 Lippert, "Law Courts," 7.

33 Naether, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, 359–410.

practices in the New Kingdom derives, the majority of divine court cases supposedly took place on festival days.[34]

As in the Sortes Astrampsychi, the issues of petitioners also addressed legal matters. One example is a second century CE Greek ticket oracle from Oxyrhynchus. It reads: "To Zeus Helius, great Serapis and the associated gods. Theon, also called Ptolemaeus, asks: if it is beneficial for me to dissolve the … decision (ἐπίκρισις), give me this" (P.Oxy. LXXIV 5018).[35] According to its editor, Pauline Ripat, the lacuna in front of the word ἐπίκρισις

> may refer to a decision in a general sense or to the process that determined a person's legal status for tax purposes; those who believed they had claim to a superior status and its accompanying lower rate of taxation would undergo *epikrisis*.

Be that as it may, undoubtedly this oracle question relates to legal matters and proves that such themes were brought in front of the divinities to obtain a decision by a high authority.[36]

Another genre within this wider Egyptian legal system are so-called Letters to the Gods.[37] Judged pejoratively by Allam as random acts of a gloomy kind of personal piety,[38] letters written by or in the name of an individual to a divinity always contain a plea for help to attain justice. People using this technique appear to have first tried different legal means to solve their cases, such as going to court, but failed. In the texts, they refer to a 'law,' that is, to a kind of justice

34 Lippert, "Law Courts," 7–8. She also mentions that oracles served as notary authentications of documents in the twenty-first and twenty-second dynasties.

35 P.Oxy. LXXIV 5018: Διὶ Ἡλίῳ μεγάλῳ Σαράπιδι καὶ τοῖς | συννάοις θεοῖς. ἀξιοῖ Θέων ὁ καὶ | Πτολεμαῖος ᾗ σύμφορόν μοί ἐστι | διαλύσασθαι α .λ .τιχ .ν ἐπίκρισιν, |τοῦτό μοι δός.

36 There is no evidence so far that the oracle questions after the Late Period had a value in trials. See Barbara Anagnostou-Canas, "'Justice' oraculaire dans l'Egypte hellénistique et romaine," *RHDF* 76 (1998): 1–16.

37 Main publication: P.Götterbriefe = Abd el-Gawad Migahid, *Demotische Briefe an Götter von der Spät – bis zur Römerzeit. Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis des religiösen Brauchtums im alten Ägypten I-II*. (PhD diss., University of Würzburg 1987); a newer treatment is Katá Endreffy, "Reason for Despair: Notes on Some Demotic Letters to Thoth," in: *The Horizon: Studies in Egyptology in Honour of M. A Nur el-Din*, ed. Basem Samit El-Sharkawy (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 241–51.

38 Schafik Allam, "Recht im pharaonischen Ägypten," in *Die Rechtskulturen der Antike: Vom Alten Orient bis zum Römischen Reich*, ed. Ulrich Manthe (Munich: Beck, 2003), 20: "Derartige Texte reflektieren offenbar Vorstellungen, die im irdischen Dasein keine konkrete Wirkung haben. Deshalb bleiben sie ebenso wie Zauberformeln und magische Praktiken außer Betracht. Solche Bräuche fanden ja keine allgemeine Anerkennung; soweit erkennbar, sind daraus keinerlei Rechtsformen erwachsen."

which shall be executed by the gods. We lack any information on exactly how and where these letters were drawn up.[39] This practice is closer to rituals in the magical papyri than oracles, for instance, because of the prayer/curse-like formulations. Currently, there are forty-three published letters to the gods, the majority of which are attested in demotic.[40] This type of letter has a (Greek) counterpart in texts that Henk Versnel called "judicial prayers" or "prayers for legal help."[41] Both reflect the outcry of humans who, finding themselves in a hopeless situation, appeal for divine justice.

Another text type consists of oracular amuletic decrees.[42] These amulets appear to have been written solely in hieratic and are attested twenty-five times in a relatively narrow time span, from the twenty-first to the twenty-third dynasty only (ca. 1075–725 BCE). The amulets consist of papyri inscribed with protective formulae that were stuffed in lockets of necklaces for newborn children. What makes them especially relevant for our inquiry into divination and legal practices is that in these texts divinities such as Mut and Thoth promise to protect the children from different kinds of harm created by gods, demons, and humans, such as diseases, evil dreams, or slander. The texts take the form of a decree, a text type usually associated with laws or important exceptional decisions by kings or high officials.[43] However, in several genres from Egypt, divinities decree certain rights to other gods or humans, as in the oracular amuletic decrees and also the Second Amuletic Passports for the Afterlife. In the latter case, these small papyri, supposedly decreed by the god Thoth, granted the deceased safe passage into the netherworld.[44]

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39 Benjamin Kelly, *Petitions, Litigation, and Social Control in Roman Egypt*, Oxford Studies in Ancient Documents (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 160–67, was able to analyze this for official petitions to the king (with reference to religious texts).

40 As checked in the Trismegistos database.

41 Hendrik S. Versnel, "Beyond Cursing: The Appeal to Justice in Judicial Prayers," in *Magika Hiera: Ancient Greek Magic and Religion*, ed. Christopher A. Faraone and Dirk Obbink (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), 60–106. A famous example of such letters to gods is the so-called Curse of Artemisia (PGM XL).

42 Main publication: Iorwerth E. S. Edwards, *Oracular Amuletic Decrees of the Late New Kingdom. Hieratic Papyri in the British Museum*, 4th series, 2 vols. (London: British Museum Press, 1960).

43 Examples include the decrees of the annual priestly synods in the Ptolemaic period carved on steles such as the famous Rosetta Stone (the Decree of Memphis). The latest treatment of texts in this genre (and edition of the Decree of Alexandria) is by Yahia el-Masry, Hartwig Altenmüller, and Heinz-Josef Thissen, *Das Synodaldekret von Alexandria aus dem Jahr 243 v. Chr.* Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur Beiheft 11 (Hamburg: Buske, 2012).

44 Mark Depauw, "A 'Second' Amuletic Passport for the Afterlife. P. Sydney Nicholson Museum 346 b," *Studien zur altägyptischen Kultur* 24 (2003): 93–99 and plate 9.

An additional category of texts are the so-called temple oaths.[45] Around 850 texts, mainly demotic ostraca from Pathyris and Thebes, contain oaths of individuals in the name of a god. Such temple oaths are attested from the second century BCE until the end of the reign of emperor Augustus. Each text starts with a date (though without the ruler's name; they are mostly dated through palaeography and context). After a protocol mentioning the parties of the process and the location, the oath starts with a liturgical formula. People swore that they had been faithful in their marital life or that they had not violated legal matters in the family (inheritance, etc.) or property/financial business (credit, loan, exchange, embezzlement, tax, robbery, etc.). The final section mentions the judge's decision and, in some cases, appendices. These temple oaths form a good example of how legal reality was intertwined with ritual practice, at least at the local level in Upper Egypt.[46] The temple oaths belong to the jurisdiction of local courts with judges called laokrites (*n3 wp.tiw*; Greek λαοκριταί). These judges decided minor cases of civil and penal law for the Egyptian part of the community, especially in the Ptolemaic period.[47]

Also known are oaths in the name of the reigning king, often uttered by a party that lost a trial in order to secure the assignment of defeat.[48] To sum up, in order to guarantee the truth of their statements or their compliance to a legal decision, parties in legal matters would swear oaths to higher entities.

Additionally, a discussion of royal regulations and ordinances is pertinent here (in Greek, προστάγματα and διαγράμματα; Egyptian *sḫn.w and wḏ(.t)*).[49] These royal orders of the Ptolemaic kings mainly affected individual cases. The matters decreed by the king in such a manner are covered by the official law or form an addition thereof.[50] Since the king served not only as the legal but also

45 Main publication: O.Tempeleide = Ursula Kaplony-Heckel, *Die demotischen Tempeleide*, 2 vol., ÄA 6 (Wiesbaden, 1963).

46 Lippert, *Einführung in die altägyptische Rechtsgeschichte*, 174–76. For a recent treatment of temple oaths, see Tami Schmidt-Gottschalk and Franziska Naether, "Die Tempeleide: Kulturelle und rechtshistorische Kontextualisierung einer Textsorte. Mit einer Edition vom O. Lips. ÄMUL dem. inv. 340," in *Hieratic, Demotic and Greek Studies and Text Editions. Of Making Many Books There Is No End: Festschrift in Honour of Sven P. Vleeming*, ed. Koenraad Donker van Heel, Francisca Hoogendijk and Cary J. Martin, Papyrologica Lugduno-Batava 34 (Leiden/Boston: Brill 2018), 288–297.

47 Lippert, "Law Courts," 8.

48 Lippert, "Law Courts," 6.

49 Joseph M. Modrzejewski, "The ΠΡΟΣΤΑΓΜΑΤΑ in the papyri," *JJP* 5 (1951): 187–206; Marie-Thérèse Lenger, "Ordres administratifs et prostagmata dans l'Egypte ptolémaïque," *CEg* 42 (1967): 145–55.

50 Werner Huß, *Die Verwaltung des ptolemaiischen Reichs*. Münchener Beiträge zur Papyrusforschung und antiken Rechtsgeschichte 104 (Munich: Beck, 2011), 184–85. *Prostagmata*, like decrees, were proclaimed publically (*programmata*) and could have

religious leader of Egypt,[51] such a decision always had a cultic component, for instance, in the language and liturgical formulae of these orders.[52]

Finally, Egyptians could turn to juristic oracles. It seems that in certain temporal and local contexts from the New Kingdom onwards, maybe even earlier, legal matters of property were settled by oracles. This phenomenon has not been studied *in toto* for ancient Egypt, and the present chapter serves only as a preliminary contribution. An example is the stele Cairo JdÉ 45327, where the god Ptah made a decision over a transaction of farmland: "This day of giving a field of […] when he reported it before Ptah, the great god, saying […] Then this great god assented very greatly."[53] Another example involves a complicated case between an embalmer and a woman and concerns the mummification of her husband (P. Hawara 4a and b).[54]

These different text types and genres indicate the large array of options and strategies that Egyptians could access for divine intervention in legal decisions.

6 Sortilege between Divine Ordeals and "Secular" Justice

Divination in Egypt from pharaonic times until late antiquity was nearly exclusively bound to the temple. Therefore, it was most likely Egyptian priests who functioned as mantic specialists, acting as intermediates between petitioners and gods, while operating divinatory devices such as the Sortes Astrampsychi. The same is true for the executors of magical papyri. Quack,

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been updated (*diorhomata*); see also Marie-Thérèse Lenger, "Les lois et ordonnances des Lagides," *CEg* 37 (1944), 109–46.

51 Jan Assmann, *Der König als Sonnenpriester: ein kosmographischer Begleittext zur kultischen Sonnenhymnik in thebanischen Tempeln und Gräbern*. ADAI.Ä 7 (Glückstadt: Augustin, 1970).

52 They are also mentioned in the Roman period; see Lippert, "Law (Definitions and Codification)," 8: "but neither seems to have been binding so that it was up to the Roman officials acting as judges to consider them or not … Thus the relevance of Egyptian (and Greek) law diminished quickly although an outright ban never seems to have been enacted." Huß, *Die Verwaltung*, 184–85 mentions *prostagmata* by gods and higher officials.

53 Brian P. Muhs, "Oracular Property Decrees in their Historical and Chronological Context," in *The Libyan Period in Egypt: Historical and Cultural Studies into the 21th–24th Dynasties. Proceedings of a Conference at Leiden University, 25–27 October 2007*, ed. Gerard P. F. Broekman, Robert J. Demarée, and Olaf E. Kaper. Egyptologische Uitgaven 23 (Leuven: Peeters, 2007), 271.

54 Joachim Friedrich Quack, "Demotische magische und divinatorische Texte," in *Omina, Orakel, Rituale und Beschwörungen*, ed. Bernd Janowski and Gernot Wilhelm, TUAT 4 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2008), 382–384; Steve Pasek, *Hawara. Eine ägyptische Siedlung in hellenistischer Zeit* (Berlin: Frank & Timme 2007), 499–501.

in his edition of the Book of the Temple, sees them as a group close or at least comparable to priests.[55] Unlike in ancient Greece, there were no wandering priests in Egypt at this time.[56] In later periods, however, a shift took place from temples or centers of pilgrimage not only to churches and monasteries but also to marginalized groups and individuals such as the hermits who carried holy books with them in opposition to the religious mainstream.[57] This development from monolocal to polylocal staff can also be observed in poets wandering through Byzantine Egypt.[58]

To perform the oracles properly, *sortilegi* must have had competence not only in ritual matters but also in matters of daily life. In order to explain divine answers about marriage, they needed a quasi-sociological insight into the local community. To deal with decreed *sortes* about business transactions, they needed to understand the life of an ancient entrepreneur.[59] Answers containing magico-medical issues such as life-threatening diseases required serious comment. The same holds for legal matters, as the five questions from the Sortes Astrampsychi mentioned at the beginning of this contribution clearly demonstrate. The *sortilegus* needed to know what he or she was doing, given the fact that the great majority of the population was illiterate, regardless of whether their mother tongue was Greek or Egyptian.[60] Until late antiquity, and parallel to the process of Christianization in Egypt, especially in smaller

55 Quack, "Göttliche Gerechtigkeit," 136–37; Quack, "Das Buch vom Tempel und verwandte Texte. Ein Vorbericht," *Archiv für Religionsgeschichte* 2 (2000): 1–20.

56 Manuel González Suárez, "Interpolaciones christianas en oráculos paganos," in *Fakes and Forgers of Classical Literature/Falsificationes y falsarios de la Literatura Clásica*, ed. Javier Martínez (Madrid: Ediciones Clásicas, 2011), 110, wrongly opts for personal consultation of the Sortes Astrampsychi, that is, without a mantic specialist. For wandering personnel in Greece, see Michael A. Flower, *The Seer in Ancient Greece* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008).

57 See the contribution of David Frankfurter in this volume.

58 Alan Cameron, "Wandering Poets: A Literary Movement in Byzantine Egypt," *Historia* 14 (1965): 470–509; Cameron, "Poets and Pagans in Byzantine Egypt," in *Egypt in the Byzantine World 300–700*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 21–46.

59 See the contribution of David M. Ratzan in this volume.

60 Lutz Popko, *Untersuchungen zur Geschichtsschreibung der Ahmosiden – und Thutmosidenzeit: "... damit man von seinen Taten noch in Millionen von Jahren sprechen wird"*, Wahrnehmungen und Spuren Altägyptens: kulturgeschichtliche Beiträge zur Ägyptologie 2 (Würzburg: Ergon, 2006), 75–81; Dorothy J. Thompson, "Literacy and Power in Ptolemaic Egypt," in *Literacy and Power in the Ancient World*, ed. Alan K. Bowman and Greg Woolf (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 69–70, 78–83; Robert K. Ritner, "The Religious, Social, and Legal Parameters of Traditional Egyptian Magic," in *Ancient Magic and Ritual Power*, ed. Marvin Meyer and Paul A. Mirecki. RGRW 129 (Leiden: Brill 2001), 52–53; Ann Ellis Hanson, "Ancient Illiteracy," in *Literacy in the Roman World*, ed.

local communities, ritual, medical, legal and administrative knowledge was bundled together in the temples. What we consider today as the fields of religion, science, education and business were concentrated in this place with the adjunct house of life, school, notary, law court, etc. Some priests were to a certain extent familiar with casuistic and codified law.

This brings us to my final question: were parts of law in Egypt a secular phenomenon; or, as I prefer to put it, can discuss them with the help of the category of secularization?[61] We usually equate modern (Western) societies with secularized society. In the public sphere, this means, for example, a non-theocratic state (in opposition to a theocracy). In the private sphere, this means leading a lifestyle without religious practices, such as prayer – in sum, a society with few or no encounters with a divinity. According to the philosopher Charles Taylor, this development has been viewed as the end of a progress of secularization. However, modern sociology and theology found that secularization is by no means a final stage of a cultural development nor can a life without spirituality be assumed even in Western (Christian) societies. Taylor situates the beginning of secularization in the Christian Western World at around 1500, although he believes the roots of the 'Secular Age' can be found in late antiquity with the spread of Christianity.[62] Be that as it may, the term 'secularization' can be used as a tool for pre-modern societies as well to describe cases in which the usual religious element, the influence of priests and the temple was perhaps not as strong as expected, where a normative or ethical way of thinking substituted cultic practices. Because of the fact that all pre-modern societies were permeated with the divine, only certain situations could be described and interpreted by a methodology involving explanations from secularization. However, there is an Egyptological discussion about secularization involving funerary cult practices. Caring for the dead through offerings and prayers was by no means a matter of (family) ethics or religious values, but a proper business matter. This is what Allam called a "Säkularisierungsdebatte". Contracts on payments for funerary practices have been made by people during their lifetime, with the priests acting for the god as a *persona ficta*. We also know of juristic cases in which dead people had been 'revived.'[63]

Mary Beard et al., Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplement 3 (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1991), 159–98.

61 For a historic methodology from the fifteenth century onwards, see Charles Taylor: *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007).

62 Taylor, *A Secular Age*, 11–16, 35–48 for his definition of three forms of secularization.

63 Allam, "Recht im pharaonischen Ägypten," 21–22, with sources from the New Kingdom. See also the discussion by Siegfried Morenz, "Totenaussagen im Dienste des Rechtes. Ein

In conclusion, we have seen in this chapter that in Egypt people asked oracles for help in legal matters. Such oracles formed part of the Egyptian system(s) of justice dating as far back as the New Kingdom. I have argued that text types such as oracles, temple oaths, and amuletic decrees should be understood in two ways: as texts of ritual practices in situations of coping with contingency; and also as texts of Egyptian/Ptolemaic/Roman Imperial law. Although ancient Egypt was a society highly intertwined with rituals, with a sacralized world order (Ma'at) and a divine king, one could interpret certain aspects of jurisdiction as quasi-secularized modes of thinking. This also shows that the Sortes Astrampsychi stand in the complex landscape of divination in Roman Egypt, and that text types with a longer tradition are increasingly elucidated both by newly edited texts and by fresh study of ones already known.

ägyptisches Element in Hellenismus und Spätantike," *Würzburger Jahrbücher* 3 (1948): 298–99 (citing literary texts); opposed by Hellmut Brunner, "Das rechtliche Fortleben des Toten bei den Ägyptern," *Archiv für Orientforschung* 18 (1957–58): 52–61; Brunner, "Der Tote als rechtsfähige Person," *ZDMG* 105 (1955), 27. Brunner opts for a sharp distinction between the world of religion and daily life ("Arbeitswelt") by the Egyptians. According to him, law has not been mingled with cultic practices.

CHAPTER 12

Freakonomika: Oracle as Economic Indicator in Roman Egypt

David M. Ratzan[1]

1 Plutarch's Challenge: What's in a Question?

Around the turn of the second century CE, Plutarch, the imperial man of letters and priest of Apollo at Delphi, wrote a dialogue now known as 'Why the Pythia does not now prophesy in verse' (*De Pythiae oraculis*).[2] In it he has his friend Philinus relate to an otherwise unknown Basilocles a conversation that had purportedly just taken place during a tour of the shrine for the benefit of a polite and philosophically-inclined young visitor named Diogenianus.[3] As the title of the dialogue suggests, the central problem is that Apollo, the patron god of music and poetry, now delivers oracular responses in prose, not verse; and when in verse, distressingly bad stuff (396D). Diogenianus suggests that this is undermining confidence (πίστις) in the oracle, as people assume either that the priestess who serves as the god's medium is no longer inspired or that the god has himself abandoned the site (402B–C). It is Theon's task, one of the major interlocutors who is often seen as standing in for Plutarch himself, to assure the reader that the god is as he ever was and that the mantic link still holds.[4] Over the course of the dialogue Theon articulates a complex and overdetermined solution to the problem, but it is the final 'cause,' which consumes the last third of the piece, that commands the attention of the Roman historian: they are living, he tells Diogenianus, in prosaic times (405D–409D).

1 I would like to thank the editors for inviting me to participate in the colloquium and W. Graham Claytor and Martin Worthington for their helpful comments and suggestions.

2 For the dating of the dialogue to sometime after ca. 95 CE, see Christopher P. Jones, "Towards a Chronology of Plutarch's Works," *JRS* 56 (1966): 63–65, 72.

3 On the historical personages behind the literary characters (and many other points of interest), see Stephan Schröder, *Plutarchs Schrift* De Pythiae oraculis: *Text, Einleitung und Kommentar* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1990).

4 On the character of Theon, see Robert Flacelière, *Sur les oracles de la Pythie* (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1937), 20–22 and Robert Lamberton, *Plutarch* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001): 160–61; cf. Konrat Ziegler, "Theon 10," in *PW*, 2nd ser. vol. 5.2, (1934), 2059–66, and Schröder, *Plutarchs Schrift*, 121–22.

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Now, this sounds depressing. But Theon is determined to snatch opportunity from the jaws of crisis, arguing that the movement from poetry to prose is evidence of a divinely sanctioned and distinctly progressive cultural development. "If," he says, "we take into consideration the workings of the god and providence, we shall see that the change has been for the better."[5] Theon then proceeds to describe a cultural history moving from an archaic predilection for fussy and expensive display to the current preference for economic precision and manly, unadorned simplicity, which is in turn reflected in the evolution of discourse: just as history and philosophy supplanted myth as ways of approaching the truth, so the clarity of prose swept away the obscurity of poetry to become the dominant idiom of representation. Prose is the appropriate mode of expression for an age that has no need either to amaze or to hide in sonorous ambiguity, for an age, in other words, that can handle the truth.[6] Theon even goes so far as to say that in this epoch of plain-speaking, poetry, if it inspires anything, inspires suspicion, being a well-known refuge for charlatans and fraudsters (407A–B). He thus turns the well-worn criticism of Delphic obscurity against those who would have the oracle continue to speak in verse (409C–D):[7] nothing should be more conducive to trust than an oracle with no need to hide behind riddling poetry, and Theon points to the recent spate of building going up all about him as evidence that the oracle's credit had never been better (408F–409B).[8]

Theon sums up his argument in a well-known encomium to the Roman Empire:

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5 Plutarch, *Pyth. orac.* 406B: Οὐ μὴν ἀλλὰ καὶ τὸ τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ τῆς προνοίας σκοποῦντες ὀψόμεθα πρὸς τὸ βέλτιον γεγενημένην τὴν μεταβολήν. Cf. 111 below.

6 Thus Ammonius, Plutarch's teacher, is made to say in another dialogue that Apollo is no less a philosopher than a prophet: ὅτι μὲν γὰρ οὐχ ἧττον ὁ θεὸς φιλόσοφος ἢ μάντις, ἐδόκει πᾶσιν ὀρθῶς… Ἀμμώνιος τίθεσθαι καὶ διδάσκειν (*Pyth. orac.* 385B).

7 Cf. Luc. *Alex*. 22. It is something of an irony, given Plutarch's strenuous antipathy to Epicureanism, that the charge of obscurity was a standard Epicurean one, e.g., Boethus's Epicurean skepticism in this dialogue, beginning 396E; on which, see Patricia FitzGibbon, "Boethus and Cassius: Two Epicureans in Plutarch," in *The Unity of Plutarch's Work*, ed. Anastasios Nikolaidis (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008), 445–60. For Epicurean views of prophecy and divination, see the evidence and literature cited in Martin F. Smith, "An Epicurean Priest from Apamea in Syria," *ZPE* 112 (1996): 130 n. 75–76.

8 Plutarch emphasizes the role of πίστις and τὸ πιθανόν in this dialogue in order to meet Diogenianus's challenge in 402B: see, e.g., 402E, 406F, 407A, 408F; cf. 396D. Indeed, his politicization of poetics in this dialogue is his response: prose is the medium of *pistis*. For the evidence for Plutarch's possible role in the successful lobbying of imperial patronage for Delphi, see Philip A. Stadter, "Plutarch: Diplomat for Delphi?" in *The Statesman in Plutarch's Works 1*, eds. Lukas De Blois et al. (Leiden: Brill, 2004), 19–32, now revised as ch. 4 in Stadter, *Plutarch and his Roman Readers* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

> τὰ δὲ νῦν πράγματα καθεστῶτα, περὶ ὧν ἐρωτῶσι τὸν θεόν, ἀγαπῶ μὲν ἔγωγε καὶ ἀσπάζομαι· πολλὴ γὰρ εἰρήνη καὶ ἡσυχία, πέπαυται δὲ πόλεμος, καὶ πλάναι καὶ στάσεις οὐκ εἰσὶν οὐδὲ τυραννίδες, οὐδ' ἄλλα νοσήματα καὶ κακὰ τῆς Ἑλλάδος ὥσπερ πολυφαρμάκων δυνάμεων χρῄζοντα καὶ περιττῶν. ὅπου δὲ ποικίλον οὐδὲν οὐδ' ἀπόρρητον οὐδὲ δεινόν, ἀλλ' ἐπὶ πράγμασι μικροῖς καὶ δημοτικοῖς ἐρωτήσεις οἷον ἐν σχολῇ προτάσεις – "εἰ γαμητέον," "εἰ πλευστέον," "εἰ δανειστέον," – τὰ δὲ μέγιστα πόλεων μαντεύματα φορᾶς καρπῶν πέρι καὶ βοτῶν ἐπιγονῆς καὶ σωμάτων ὑγείας, ἐνταῦθα περιβάλλειν μέτρα καὶ πλάττειν περιφράσεις καὶ γλώττας ἐπάγειν πύσμασιν ἁπλῆς καὶ συντόμου δεομένοις ἀποκρίσεως, ἔργον ἐστὶ φιλοτίμου σοφιστοῦ καλλωπίζοντος ἐπὶ δόξῃ χρηστήριον.
>
> *Pyth. orac.* 408B–C

> For my part, I am well pleased with and embrace the present state of affairs about which people question the god. For peace and quiet abound, and war has ceased. There are no migrations or civil wars, no tyrannies or any of the other illnesses and evils of Greece needing remedies, as it were, of complex and extraordinary powers. Where there is nothing complicated or secret or terrible, but the questions are on small and common matters, like the hypotheticals set in school – if one ought to marry, if one ought to sail, if one ought to make a loan – and the most important consultations on the part of states concern crop yields, the increase of herds, and public health – to swaddle such things in verse, devise circumlocutions, and introduce obscurities into inquiries requiring a concise and simple answer, that is the work of an ambitious sophist embellishing an oracle for the sake of his reputation.[9]

Theon's seeming devaluation of poetry and glorification of the Roman present over the Greek past may strike some readers as surprising at first glance – poetry certainly was not *passé* in the late first century, and Tacitus, Plutarch's younger contemporary, could certainly be forgiven for quipping that Greeks were interested only in their own history, *Graeci … qui sua tantum mirantur.*[10] Of course, one would be hard-pressed to level this particular charge against the author of the *Parallel Lives*;[11] but more importantly, Plutarch subscribed to

9 For the text, Schröder, *Plutarchs Schrift, loc. cit*. The translation is adapted from Frank C. Babbitt, *Plutarch's Moralia*, vol. 5, LCL 306 (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936), 337–39.

10 Tacitus, *Ann.* 2.88, cf. 2.53.

11 There is some debate, however, over the nature of Plutarch's interest in the Roman *Lives*, whether it is a subtle form of cultural imperialism, chauvinism, resistance, or, alternatively,

Plato's critique of poetry and had an almost Hegelian view of Roman power, on display here and which John Dillon has aptly compared to Francis Fukuyama's vision of the 'end of history.'[12] What is particularly interesting, however, is that although Theon's original brief was to defend the oracle against stylistic criticism, we see that there are in fact two distinct charges here: not only is the oracle's lack of literary refinement an embarrassment to taste and a scandal to belief, but so are the questions that are put to it, suggesting that the oracle's – and Greece's – best days are behind it: no longer do people of consequence consult the god in matters of historical importance; instead the oracle is occupied with the merely quotidian concerns of the *hoi polloi*.[13]

Plutarch, for philosophical and rhetorical reasons we cannot explore here, joined the stylistic and substantive charges. I, on the other hand, wish to sever them and explore the suggestion that there was a particular historical change in the *type* of question asked of oracles, and that this specific change was an *effect* of Roman rule. In other words, what if we take seriously the notion that there is a connection between social and economic conditions in the ancient Mediterranean and the sort of questions ancient individuals put to oracles?

This is hardly an implausible – or new – suggestion. Half a century ago G. K. Park in an essay on the social context of African divination asserted that "for each society in which divination is practised there is … a proper list

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evidence of the fundamental cultural unity of the imperial élite. Compare, e.g., the view of Simon Swain, "Hellenic Culture and the Roman Heroes of Plutarch," *JRS* 110 (1990): 126–45, Tim Duff, *Plutarch's Lives: Exploring Vice and Virtue* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), and Stadter, *Plutarch and his Roman Readers* to Christopher P. Jones, *Plutarch and Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971); cf. W. Jeffrey Tatum, "Why Parallel Lives?" in *Plutarch's Lives: Parallelism and Purpose*, ed. Noreen Humble (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2010), 1–22.

12 John Dillon, "Plutarch and the End of History," in *Plutarch and his Intellectual World*, ed. Judith Mossman (London: Duckworth, 1997), 233–40. For Plutarch's poetics, see "How the Young Man ought to Listen to Poetry" (*Quomodo adul.*) and Donald Russell, *Plutarch: How to Study Poetry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011). For Plutarch's providential take on Roman history, see Jones, *Plutarch and Rome*, 69, 90, 99–100; Simon Swain, "Plutarch: Chance, Providence, and History," *AJP* 110 (1989): 272–302; and Jan Opsomer, "Quelques réflexions sur la notion de providence chez Plutarque," in *Plutarco y la historia: Acta del V simposio español sobre Plutarco*, eds. Carlos Schrader et al. (Zaragoza: Universidad de Zaragoza, 1997), 343–56.

13 We hear an echo of this second charge in another of Plutarch's Delphian dialogues, "On the Obsolescence of Oracles" (*De defectu*), in which the Cynic Didymus is made to complain precisely that the oracle is now "stuffed" (καταπιμπλάμενον) with "shameful and impious" (αἰσχρῶν καὶ ἀθέων) questions about "treasures and inheritances and unlawful marriages" (413B). For the wider historical context of oracular practice in the empire, see Robin Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians* (New York: Knopf, 1987), 168–261 (direct assessment of Plutarch's core claims at 200–1, 230, 237–39).

of its occasions; and such a list may say much about the sources of strain in that society."[14] Sarah Iles Johnston recently affirmed Park's assertion: "in legitimating actions and decisions, divination … serves … as an indication of where legitimation is most necessary, and thereby where stresses – within a society, within a group, within a family or within the individual psyche of an enquirer – are strongest."[15] This anthropological theory, however, would seem to be a difficult one to test at a remove of two millennia, and Johnston more or less despairs of the feasibility of such a reading of ancient oracles: "This 'social stress' approach to divination does not always work … in ancient cases where history leaves us only a partial picture of the environment in which divination took place." This conclusion was at least in part a comment on one scholar's attempt to place an array of late Roman oracular practice in the context of Egyptian religious history,[16] and while I make no pronouncement on that particular project of religious contextualization, it seems to me that Graeco-Roman Egypt remains the most promising ancient milieu for studying the 'social stress' theory of ancient oracles. There is, in fact, no better ancient laboratory in which to conduct this sort of anthropological research than Egypt, for it is only there that we find preserved both sufficient oracular texts and contemporaneous non-divinatory documents from which we may reconstruct something of the way in which ancient individuals went about gathering information and then making and legitimating decisions.[17] In what follows I hope to adumbrate what oracular texts such as the ticket-oracles of Egypt and the Sortes Astrampsychi can tell us, as tools, about the problems they were meant to fix;[18] and furthermore what changes in these tools over

14 George K. Park, "Divination and its Social Contexts." *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 93 (1963): 195–96.

15 Sarah Illes Johnston, "Introduction: Divining Divination," in *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, ed. Sarah Illes Johnston and Peter T. Struck (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 23.

16 David Frankfurter, "Voices, Books, and Dreams: The Diversification of Divination Media in Late Antique Egypt," in Johnston and Struck, *Mantikê*, 233–54.

17 Cf. David Zeitlyn, "Divinatory Logics: Diagnosis and Predictions Mediating Outcomes." *Current Anthropology* 53 (2012): 544.

18 See Chapter One for definitions, discussion, and literature on lot oracles, ticket oracles, and the Sortes Astrampsychi. In this essay I will refer to questions and responses in the Sortes Astrampsychi by number, e.g., 'question 20' and 'response 15.7' (i.e., decade 15, response 7). See Gaëlle Tallet, "Oracles," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, ed. Christina Riggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 398–418 for the history and cultural background of oracular practice in Roman Egypt.

time suggest about corresponding changes in the underlying problems, which changes I, following Plutarch, will argue are a consequence of Roman rule.[19]

2 Oracles, Uncertainty, and Information

One of the basic problems divination seeks to solve is uncertainty. This much is self-evident. Yet the nature of ancient uncertainty and how oracles resolve it are not.[20] Indeed, one of the major challenges in approaching oracles from this perspective is how best to organize the material for analysis. A typical strategy is to categorize divinatory texts by time (i.e., questions about the past, present,

19 Lane Fox aptly described the growth of oracles in the imperial period as a "blossoming" of "information technology" (*Pagans and Christians*, 212), cf. Zeitlyn's view of divination as a "clarifying technology" ("Divinatory Logics," 526). The contention of this chapter is that the timing was not coincidental, but the product of fertile imperial soil. The passage from Plutarch discussed above is routinely connected to our documentary and literary oracular texts, e.g., Dominique Valbelle and Geneviève Husson, "Les questions oraculaires d'Égypte: histoire de la recherche, nouveautés et perspectives," in *Egyptian Religion: The Last Thousand Years*, ed. Willy Clarysse et al, 2 vols. (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 2:1066; Johannes Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel: Astragal – und Alphabetchresmologien der hochkaiserzeitlichen Orakelrenaissance* (Munich: Beck, 2007), 191–92, 287–88; Franziska Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi: Problemlösungsstrategien durch Orakel im römischen Ägypten* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010), 136–40; but his suggestion as to the historical relationship between changes in oracular questions and Roman power is, so far as I can tell, usually ignored. In what follows I do not endorse Plutarch's formulation of the 'problem,' but explore his assertion that there is a causal link between the perceived change in the kinds of questions put to oracles and the social, economic, and political conditions of the Roman Empire.

20 Some of most penetrating discussions of uncertainty in the ancient world and strategies for mitigating it have come from historians studying how ancient individuals and societies dealt with chronic uncertainty in the food supply. See, e.g., Peter Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World: Responses to Risk and Crisis* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) and Thomas W. Gallant, *Risk and Survival in Ancient Greece: Reconstructing the Rural Domestic Economy* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1991). More recently, there has been interesting work connecting the psychological cognition of uncertainty, economic rationality, and its ramifications in various forms of ancient decision-making and institutional development. See, e.g., Dennis P. Kehoe, *Management and Investment on Estates in Roman Egypt during the Early Empire* (Bonn: Habelt, 1992); Kehoe, *Law and the Rural Economy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2007); Steven Johnstone, *A History of Trust in Ancient Greece* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); Philip Venticinque, "Risk Management: Social capital and economic strategies on late Roman Estates in Oxyrhynchus," *Historia* 63 (2014): 463–86. For the relationship of risk to ancient curses, see Esther Eidinow, "Risk and the Greeks: a new approach to understanding binding curses," in *Contesti magici*, ed. Marina Piranomonte and Francisco Marco Simón (Roma: De Luca, 2012), 13–21.

or future) or topic (e.g., travel, love, or health).[21] While these are perfectly reasonable ways to proceed, particularly the latter, since it appears to reveal ancient sources of anxiety or 'danger,'[22] here I wish to adopt a slightly different organizational principle and group divinatory texts on the basis of *motive*.[23] Travel, for instance, was always dangerous in the ancient world; from the perspective of motive, the question is *why* someone is weighing the dangers of travel. What, in other words, is the context in which this specific danger is being assessed? What interests are being counterbalanced against the dangers of travel, and what does it mean that the individual consulted an oracle about this particular trade-off, especially as divination was not usually free?[24]

There were, of course, many motives for consulting an oracle about travelling: e.g., one might wish to go on a pilgrimage or visit family. Among our set of possible motives is one we may broadly identify as 'economic,' by which I mean consultations proceeding from the need to make difficult decisions about production, exchange, or the enforcement of property rights or contracts. The characterization of the uncertainty motivating an act of divination as 'economic' thus resides not in the topical focalization of the danger in the divinatory text or the temporal logic of the question, but in the fact that a particular danger is being weighed against the potential for material gain or loss. It is worth conceding in advance that 'the economic' will

21 E.g., Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 195–204; Esther Eidinow, *Oracles, Curses, and Risk among the Ancient Greeks* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 125–28; Kim Beerden, *World Full of Signs: Ancient Greek Divination in Context* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 203–5.

22 The Greeks and Romans had no concept of risk or probability, only an informal, unquantified (i.e., not properly probabilistic) notion of 'danger' (κίνδυνος, cf. *periculum*), which they employed in economic and legal discourse. See, e.g., Eidinow, *Oracles*, 10–25 and Beerden, *World Full of Signs*, 196–203 for recent discussions of 'risk' and 'uncertainty' in ancient Greece and Éva Jakab, *Risikomanagement beim Weinkauf: Periculum und Praxis in Imperium Romanum* (Munich: Beck, 2009) for a thorough discussion of the treatment of 'danger' in the buying and selling of wine in the Roman Empire. For the history of the concept of risk and probability, see: Ian Hacking, *The Emergence of Probability: A Philosophical Study of Early Ideas about Probability, Induction and Statistical Inference* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Peter L Bernstein, *Against the Gods: The Remarkable Story of Risk* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1996); and James Franklin, *The Science of Conjecture: Evidence and Probability before Pascal* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

23 See Zeitlyn, "Divinatory Logics" for the argument for studying divination from the perspective of the social psychology of the client.

24 We have practically no direct evidence for the costs of consultation, but the assumption is that consultation generally was provided for a fee: see, e.g., Cic. *Div*. 1.132 (= Enn. Vahlen 319–23); Acts 16:16, and Luc. *Alex*. 23. On P.Aberd. 62 (Soknopaiou Nesos, I), which seems to record a charge of four drachmas ὑπὲρ μαντείας, see Valbelle and Husson, "Les questions oraculaires d'Égypte," 1070. See Klingshirn, this volume, n. 20.

necessarily be a heterogeneous category with respect to the traditional topic – or problem-based organization. It is also true that motives are notoriously hard to assess, not least from ancient texts such as these; and furthermore, that even when a motive can reasonably be inferred, it is nevertheless possible, indeed probable, that the petitioner might have had several motives at once, some of which remain hidden to us. These are, however, universal hazards in sociology or anthropology and argue merely for caution in selecting evidence and against pressing what evidence we have too far: there is no doubt that the people of the ancient Mediterranean not only made decisions about matters of production, exchange, and enforcement, but also conceived of them in these terms, and resorted to various devices in order to mitigate the uncertainty attending them, including oracles.[25] It is only by studying divinatory texts with a view to motive that we may reorient the analytical lens so as to recover a fundamental perspective onto ancient divination, namely seeing it as part of a larger process or algorithm of practical decision making (in this case economic decision making) in a highly uncertain world.[26]

However one organizes the material, one fact about uncertainty remains important to recognize from the outset: it is not monolithic or static throughout history. Uncertainty is not merely the product of basic structural features of the world, like time or the environment, but also of the dynamic forces of human institutions. This is to say that uncertainty is itself a properly historical object. No one, for instance, doubts that we live in far less uncertain times than any of our ancient oracular petitioners.[27] Indeed, it seems clear not only that we live with less uncertainty, but also that the sources, perception, and conceptualization of uncertainty are in many respects qualitatively different today than in the Roman world.[28] Seen in this light, our oracular texts represent an archaeology of uncertainty in the ancient Mediterranean. My

25 On the question of ancient economic rationality see Dennis P. Kehoe, "Rational Actor Models," in *The Encyclopedia of Ancient History*, ed. Roger S. Bagnall et al. (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2013), 10:5737–38.

26 Cf. David Zeitlyn, "Divination as dialogue: Negotiation of meaning with random responses," in *Social Intelligence and Interaction*, ed. Esther N. Goody (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 189–205; Michael Winkelman and Philip M. Peek, "Introduction: Divination and the Healing Process," in *Divination and Healing: Potent Vision*, ed. Winkelman and Peek (Tucson, AZ: University of Arizona Press, 2004), 3–25, esp. 7; and Zeitlyn, *"Divinatory Logics*." This is not to deny the relevance or insight to be gained from approaching divination from other theoretical perspectives or concerns, but to assert only that a fundamental perspective is the wider context of decision-making.

27 See n. 20 above.

28 See Beerden, *Worlds Full of Signs*, 199 for a discussion of the modern sociology of risk and uncertainty.

specific contention is that we may trace in this archaeology a particular history of quantitative and qualitative change in the nature and scope of uncertainty, revealing the Roman period as a comparative nadir of economic uncertainty in the ancient world.

If we are going to consider divination functionally as an information gathering technique in economic decision-making, it is worth digressing briefly on the relationship between information, uncertainty, and economic transactions.

Transactions, of course, may take many different forms, e.g., bartering, cash sales in markets, contracts for non-simultaneous transactions, yet all transactions may be analyzed according to the particular costs associated with exchanging X, in way Y, with partner Z. These costs all together are called transaction costs.[29] According to Douglass North, the source of transaction costs is the price of information, or in his words:

> the costliness of information is the key to the costs of transacting, which consist of the costs of measuring the valuable attributes of what is being exchanged and the costs of protecting rights, and policing and enforcing agreements.[30]

In other words, it takes resources in order to determine whether or not, e.g., a certain slave is worth that price; whether one may trust the seller; whether the slave even belongs to the seller; what the slave's medical history is; and how, should a problem arise, one might get satisfaction from the seller. 'Institutions,' in this discourse, are sets of rules established or evolved in order to mitigate the costliness of information.[31] *Agorai* or *fora*, for instance, are excellent institutions for discovering prices and the quality of relatively uniform, simple goods like dates or olive oil, since one has an array of merchants with comparable goods collocated under one portico. Such markets are, however, institutionally inadequate for selling slaves, since slaves are (from this

29 For recent essays on this approach in ancient history, see Dennis P. Kehoe, David M. Ratzan, and Uri Yiftach, *Law and Transaction Costs in the Ancient Economy* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015).

30 Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change, and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 27.

31 "When functioning effectively … institutions can be understood as devices for reducing uncertainty, simplifying decision-making, and promoting cooperation among human agents so that the costs of coordinating economic and other activities can be lowered" (Eirik G. Furubotn and Rudolf Richter, *Institutions and Economic Theory: The Contribution of the New Institutional Economics*, 2nd ed. [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2005], 7).

particularly inhumane perspective) highly variable, durable 'goods' potentially containing significant latent 'defects.' In other words, unlike buying a bunch of dates, whose properties are more or less obvious and for which I hand over a set number of *drachmai* right now in order to consume in the immediate future, purchasing a slave entails my factoring into the price both a relatively more complex determination of value and projection of that value over a certain extended period of time in which I expect to extract it, one far beyond the moment of exchange. In the absence of some assurance that I am either going to get my money's worth or my money back, I am simply not going to pay as much for that slave as she or he might in fact be worth. The seller is then left with the option of either not getting the full value of his slave or not selling. A simple market, in other words, will likely be unable to mitigate the high cost of the information sufficiently in order to produce an efficient slave market in which buyers feel confident in their ability to evaluate the goods and the security of realizing that value. We therefore need other institutions, either informal ones, like letters of introduction (which establish the seller's reputation and work as a sort of guarantee for the buyer), or formal ones, like licensing, regulation (e.g., 'lemon laws'), and contract law, in order to facilitate such transactions and make them more efficient.[32]

The important point in all this is that institutions, informal or formal, do their work by lowering transaction costs, and they do this in large part by reducing the cost of information. The relatively high cost of information in antiquity is in fact one explanation for why many transactions and types of transactions simply did not take place: there was altogether too much uncertainty for a rational person to commit. And this uncertainty was of the most basic type, relating to things we in the developed Western world tend to think of as comparatively easy or 'cheap' to discover, such as reliable information about prices, the quality of goods, a record of a person's past performance, one's legal rights, etc. "Throughout the ancient world, it was normal to prefer divination to indecision," and our oracular texts and practices are, in this view, but one more institution through which ancient individuals attempted to bring down the cost of information in order to make a decision.[33] Thinking in these terms is helpful precisely because it encourages us to recognize that the information oracles provided served a particular purpose, performing a particular function

32 I chose this depressing example specifically because Roman law recognized the effects of adverse selection in the slave market and took legal steps to mitigate it. See Dennis P. Kehoe and Bruce W. Frier, "Law and economic institutions," in *The Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*, ed. Ian Morris, Richard Saller, and Walter Scheidel (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 119–21.

33 Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 211.

in a larger strategy of information gathering and decision-making – indeed, that the information thus gathered was, at least potentially, on an ontological par with that gained from other sources in the eyes of the petitioner. Whatever the problem, whatever the time frame, an oracular question always addressed a present crisis in the hope of gaining useful or actionable information.[34]

Take, for example, a ticket oracle to Ammon in second-century Soknopaiou Nesos asking whether or not some cowherds had harmed Persius's cow (P.Stras. IV 221):

> Κύριε Ἄμμων, εἰ οἱ βου-
> κόλοι τῆς κώ(μης) ἠδίκη-
> σαν τὴν βοῦν τοῦ Περσίο̣υ.
> τοῦτο <μοι> δός
>
> Lord Ammon, if the cowherds of the village harmed Persius's cow, give me this (chit).

This is indeed a question about the past, but asked in order to help determine how to proceed in the present. The fact that the cowherds here are specified as from "the village" might indicate that the one inquiring is not himself a villager, but perhaps an absentee landowner or a *phrontistēs* (a steward or agent, like a Roman *procurator*), and that no one in the village is willing to confirm or deny what had happened to Persius's cow to a comparative 'outsider.'[35] Outsiders, in fact, are the parties most likely to use the law in resolving disputes, both then and now, since they have the fewest and weakest ties to the community and therefore the least ability to employ local, often informal institutions.[36] Yet in order to use the law effectively outsiders need information, such as the names of the offending party.

Intriguingly, we find place-holding complaints in Roman-era petitions submitted without names, such as BGU II 651 (192), in which a citizen of

34 For discussions of the temporal orientations and logics of divinations, see Zeitlyn, "Divinatory Logics" and Beerden, *Worlds Full of Signs*, 174–193.

35 Cf. SB XVI 12579 (late 2nd c. CE, Toka, Oxyrhynchite nome), a letter in which a *phrontistēs* reports that some local dependents were refusing to deal with an "unknown" person about some cypress wood, but insisting on direct communication with their landlord: ἔλεγ[ο]ν γὰρ ὅτ[ι [ἐ]πὶ (*l.* ἐπεὶ) ἡμῶν γεοῦχός ἐ|στ̣ι̣[ν], διὰ τοῦτο ἐγράψαμεν αὐτῷ ἵνα | μὴ [τῷ ἀδή]λ̣ῳ γράψωμεν. τὰ κυπαρίσ|σι[να γὰρ] τῷ ἀδήλῳ οὐ δυνάμεθα (lacuna)…

36 Cf. Robert C. Ellickson, *Order without Law: How Neighbors Settle Disputes* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991) and Benjamin Kelly, *Petitions, Litigation, and Social Control in Roman Egypt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Ptolemais Euergetis (the metropolis of the Arsinoite nome) and resident of the village of Karanis (*ergo*, one of the local élite in the village), informs a centurion that some of his buildings in the satellite settlement of Ptolemais Nea had been burnt down by "somebody, I do not know who," and that he therefore submits this petition in order to preserve his right of action against the guilty parties, should they ever be "made clear."[37] We can easily imagine that those who submitted such petitions might have made recourse to an oracle in order to confirm a suspicion and reveal the culprit for indictment. Indeed, the record is full of petitions naming specific individuals, and one often wonders precisely how the plaintiffs could have known who was behind some of these offenses.

Many interpretations have been advanced to explain 'crime' in the petitions, from older claims that they represent a culture of generalized lawlessness and criminality in Egypt, to more recent anthropological and sociological explanations about the dynamics of feuding and violence in village life.[38] Most accounts tend to assume that the specificity of the complaints reflects the actual facts, i.e., that the acts described happened more or less in the way in which they are reported and that the accused were clearly known to the plaintiffs, which is to say that the acts were done either in the open or in the context of a feud. It would be perverse to argue against either proposition in most cases; but we should not therefore believe that just because a plaintiff can name a defendant the latter necessarily committed the act openly with the full knowledge of the former. Documents like BGU II 651 show that there were plenty of difficult and mysterious cases in which discovering who did what remained a problem and therefore a hurdle to using the legal system effectively. It is entirely possible that some of the named defendants were 'discovered' through oracular means.[39]

Although I know of no evidence explicitly describing a strategy of combining oracular consultation with judicial proceedings in the Roman period, such a strategy would represent a plausible development from the Egyptian tradition of judicial oracles, in which disputes were adjudicated and culprits revealed by the god as it was paraded during public festivals.[40] In her study of jurisdiction

37 BGU II 651.6–10: ὑπό τινων, οὓς καὶ ἀγνοῶ. ὅθεν| ἐπιδίδωμι τάδε τὰ βιβλίδια εἰς τὸ|ἐν καταχωρισμῷ γενέσθα(ι) πρὸ(ς) τὸ | μένιν μοι τὸν λόγον πρὸς τοὺς φα|νησ\ομένους/ αἰτίους.

38 See, e.g., Kelly, *Petitions* and Ari Z. Bryen, *Violence in Roman Egypt: A Study in Legal Interpretation* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvanian Press, 2013).

39 Cf. Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 381 n. 83.

40 Jaroslav Černý, "Egyptian Oracles," in *A Saite Oracle Papyrus from Thebes in the Brooklyn Museum* (*P.Brooklyn 47.218.3*), ed. Richard A. Parker (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1962), 35–48; William M. Brashear, "The Greek Magical Papyri: An Introduction and Survey," in *Heidentum: Die religiösen Verhältnisse in den Provinzen*, ed. Wolfgang Haase,

on the basis of the oracular and documentary texts of New Kingdom Deir el-Medîna, A. G. McDowell showed that one can detect a difference in the sort of problems that were put to oracles and those submitted to the *ḳnbt* courts.[41] Generally speaking, oracles appear to have been consulted most often in order to resolve real estate disputes. These consultations, however, often took place in anticipation or the context of legal proceedings, with the plaintiff turning to the court to enforce the oracle's response. In this community, then, the oracle and the judicial system appear to have worked in tandem, in a manner not unlike that suggested above for the Roman period. Intriguingly, the situation appears to have been different for cases of theft:

> [W]hile the god was often asked to identify a thief, we never read of orders to the guilty party, oaths or penalties. These were not trials, then, although in practice once the god had branded someone a thief, public opinion would probably have pressured him into surrendering the goods. It is one of the mysteries of the law in Deir el-Medîna that despite the evident prevalence of private theft in the village we only rarely hear of any sort of litigation, investigation, or penalties which have to do with this crime.[42]

If the silence with respect to legal suits over theft is a real one, the oracular and legal systems in this instance can be seen working in parallel, not tandem.

The survival of the ticket-oracle tradition into the Graeco-Roman period was no doubt attended by its adaptation to a legal system that indisputably grew in sophistication, power, and control with respect to what had preceded it. If the suggestion above is correct, by the Roman period the role of oracular consultation had shrunk considerably and moved into the shadow of the law: instead of functioning as a judge issuing public convictions, the oracle was now consulted as a private and unnamed informant advising on either the wisdom

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vol. II.18.5 of *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995), 3380–84; Valbelle and Husson, "Les questions oraculaires d'Égypte," 1055–63. See also Naether's contribution in this volume.

41 Andrea G. McDowell, *Jurisdiction in the Workmen's Community of Deir el-Medîna* (Leiden: Nederlands Instituut voor het Nabije Oosten, 1990): 107–41. See Robert Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago, 1993), 214–20 for the continuance of the judicial role of oracles into later periods; cf. Claude Traunecker, "L'appel au divin: la crainte des dieux et les serments de temple," in *Oracles et prophéties dans l'antiquité. Actes du Colloque de Strasbourg 15–17 juin 1995*, ed. Jean-Georges Heintz (Paris: De Boccard, 1997).

42 McDowell, *Jurisdiction*, 229.

or the particulars of a legal relationship or public suit.[43] In other words, from the perspective of the legal system the clear legitimation function documented by McDowell for the New Kingdom was subordinated to or sublimated into the information function. Such an evolution in fact mirrors a similar movement in oaths, which also went from having a public, judicial function in the Egyptian tradition to an increasingly private, informal, supporting role in private legal affairs over the course of the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. The parallel changes in juridical function of oracles and oaths would thus appear to be two facets of the same response to the increasing efficacy of the legal systems instituted by the Greeks and Romans, a case that has been made explicitly for oaths.[44] In all events, we thus see how the past was in fact part of the present, and how the uncertainty, properly speaking, resided in a question of how to proceed; and further how oracular information might be slotted into a very worldly process of enforcing all manner of rights in the Roman period.

We may demonstrate the same present concern with 'costly' information in questions about the future. Take, for example, P.Oxy. VIII 1148 (Oxyrhynchus, I):

κύριέ μου Σάραπι Ἥλιε
εὐεργέτα. εἰ βέλτειόν
ἐστιν Φανίαν τὸν υἱό(ν)
μου καὶ τὴν γυναῖκ(α)
αὐτοῦ μὴ συμφωνῆσαι
νῦν τῷ πατρὶ ἀ(υτῆς) ἀλλὰ
ἀντιλέγειν καὶ μὴ δι-
δόναι γράμματα, τοῦ-
τό μοι σύμφωνον ἔνεν-
κε. ἔρρω(σο).

43 Cf. Ritner, *Mechanics*, 215–20 and Ritner, "Egyptian Magical Practice under the Roman Empire: The Demotic Spells and their Religious Context," in *Heidentum: Die religiösen Verhältnisse in den Provinzen*, edited by Wolfgang Haase, vol. II.18.5 of *Aufstieg und Niedergang der römischen Welt* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995) on the 'private' nature of demotic oracle spells from the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. The argument above takes a more positive view of 'privatization' as a response to Roman rule, one precipitated as much by improvements in the quality of enforcement and the amount of information available as in the marginalization and supposed 'criminalization' of indigenous religious practice. Not all oracles, however, were private in the Roman period: procession oracles, which are attested, were still of necessity public affairs.

44 But not recently and not in these terms: see Erwin Siedl, *Der Eid im römisch-ägyptischen Provinzialrecht*, MBPF 17 (Munich: Beck, 1933).

6 ἀ(υτῆς): implied by P. J. Parsons, *City of the Sharp-Nosed Fish* (London: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 2007), 176; ἀ(υτοῦ) *ed. pr.*

O lord Sarapis Helios, beneficent one. If it is better for my son Phanias and his wife not to agree now with her father but to oppose (him) and not give documents [i.e., execute a written contract], bring out this in agreement with me. Farewell.

Asking Sarapis Helios whether or not one's son should make a contract with his father-in-law is, in one sense, a question about the future. Yet the problem is clearly in the present (line 6, "now"), and this text reveals a specific crisis of legitimization, one of Park's key divinatory functions. The negative framing of the elements suggests that Phanias and his wife are inclined or being pressured to make the deal. Also, the petitioner seems to be looking explicitly to bolster or justify with divine authority his own opinion (line 9). This is, then, a crisis of legitimacy between and within families, but significantly it is crystalizing at a moment when those familial relationships are about to be re-inscribed as legal ones. In most cases, we can only speculate about the dynamics of social power or paternal authority that undoubtedly lie in the background of so many of our surviving legal documents. Here, however, we catch a glimpse of how oracular authority or information was deployed to help negotiate the complicated and stressful intersection of or transition between two institutions, the family and the law.

The last example suggests that we should not understand ancient oracular information merely in light of its effective content (e.g., the need for a name in order to lodge a criminal complaint), but also for its psychological value, particularly if it is true that oracular procedure had become essentially less public and more of a private experience in this period. Indeed, the evidence suggests that one of the prime functions of oracles was to help with the psychological effects of uncertainty, reducing the anxiety that attended any leap across a gap in one's knowledge.[45] For example, just before the Roman period a certain Lysimachos tells his sister:

... ἐπικέ-
κριταί μοι μὴ καταβῆ-

45 For comparative studies on oracles and anxiety management, see several of the essays in Winkelman and Peek, *Divination and Healing*. Whether or not divination freed one from anxiety or in fact induced it was argued in antiquity, e.g., Aulus Gellius, *Noct. att.* 14.1.35–36.

ναι ἕως τῆς κε, καὶ
ὡς θέλει ὁ Σεκνεβτῦ(νις)
ὁ κύριος θεὸς καταβή-
σομαι ἐλευθέρῳ̣ς ...
P.Tebt. II 284.2–7 [TEBTYNIS, 70–41 BCE]

It has been decided that I should not go down till the 25th; and as Soknebtynis the mighty god wills it, I will go freely.

Here the god has 'liberated' Lysimachos from the anxiety produced by the need to take a difficult decision. It is no coincidence that many of the answers in the Sortes Astrampsychi conclude with the words μὴ ἀγωνία: 'Don't worry.'

The anxiety produced by having to operate in a world of costly information can also be traced in the number of deals left 'up in the air' in the Roman period. Μετέωρος was at once a technical word for provisional or half-executed contracts, as well as a general word for 'unfinished business.'[46] Although the word is attested in Ptolemaic papyri, it is never found in the general context of business. This, however, became its dominant semantic orbit in the Roman period. We have, for example, several letters which relate to 'unfinished business,' usually with appeals to the recipient that he nail things down. In BGU II 417 (unknown provenance, 2nd c. CE) Chairemon writes to his son Dioskoros as follows:

περὶ ὧν ἔγραψας μελήσει μοι καὶ ἐγὼ δὲ σὲ ἐρ\ω/-
τῶ πάντα τὰ μετέωρα ἀπαλλάξαι καὶ μὴ πά-
λιν σεαυτῷ μετέωρα καταλείπε[ι]ν αἰσθόμε(νον)
τὴν τοῦ καιροῦ πικρίαν· ἀπάλλαξον οὖν σεαυ-
τὸν ἀπὸ παντὸς μετεώρου, ἵνα ἤδη ποτὲ
ἀμέριμνος γένῃ καὶ τὰ \ἐμὰ/ μετεωρίδια ἤδη πο-
τὲ τύχην σχῆι.... (2–8)

I will take heed of what you wrote, but I ask that you discharge all the matters up in the air and take it upon yourself not to leave such matters in suspense again, since you perceive the bitterness of the times. So, free yourself from every unresolved matter, in order that you may be at peace and then my remaining loose ends will be a success.

46 Cf. Ludwig Mitteis, "Neue Rechtsurkunden aus Oxyrhynchos," *APF* 1 (1901): 178–99, esp. section 2.A: "Die Technik der bücherlichen Eintragungen" (190–99).

Similarly, P.Brem. 17 (Hermopolis Magna, 113–120 CE) preserves the letter of Besarion to the *stratēgos* Apollonios, in which she asks for help with some unfinished business in Alexandria, the uncertainty surrounding which is making her testy and depressed:

πολλάκις ἔγραψα παρακαλῶν
περὶ τῆς ἀπ[α]ιτήσεως τοῦ ἐργά(του)
καὶ τῆς ἐπισκέψεως. καὶ νῦν ἐρω-
τῶ{ι}, ἵνα ὡς ὑπέσχου β[ο]ηθήσῃς,
ὅπως ἀπαλλαγῶ{ι} τούτων τῶν με-
τεώρων. ἐγὼ βούλ[ομ]α[ι] νῦν
ἀναπλεῦσαι καὶ ἀτυμῷι (*l.* ἀθυμῶ), ἕως οὗ
ἐκπλέξω ὃ ἔχω{ι} ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείαι
μετέωρον, καὶ τῶν θεῶν βοηθούν-
[των - ca. 11 -] ...

I have often written to you, inquiring after the worker's claim and the *episkepsis*. And I ask you now, so that you help me as you promised, to discharge these unresolved matters. I wish now to sail up river and I am out of sorts until I straighten out this unfinished business that I have in Alexandria, and if the gods come to my aid ...

Besarion is clearly a good candidate for oracular therapy. But perhaps not quite yet: she still has mundane sources of information and help, namely the *stratēgos* Apollonios. The petitioner who submitted the ticket oracle P.Köln IV 202 (Oxyrhynchus?, 2nd c. CE), on the other hand, has run out of earthly options and is at a crossroads about what to do with his unfinished business:

κύρι Θῶνι,
ἡ (*l.* εἰ) οὐ θέλεις με πισ-
τεῦσε (*l.* πιστεῦσαι) ἐμαυτὸν
Διογένει τῷ τοῦ. ϛ̣χ̣...
καὶ ᾧ ἐὰν προ.....
ἐν Ἀλεξανδρείᾳ χάριν
τοῦ μετεώρου μου χιρογρά-
φου καὶ φοβοῦ μ[ο]υ̣ ἐμβο-
λῆς, τοῦτό μοι δώς (*l.* δός).

8 φοβοῦ μ[ο]υ̣: φοβοῦμ[α]ι *ed. pr.* | 8–9 ἐμβο|λῆς *ex corr.* ἐμβο|λάς

> Lord Thonis, if you do not wish me to entrust myself to Diogenes son of [N.] and to whomever else … in Alexandria on account of my provisional cheirograph and my fear for the shipment, give me this (chit).

The petitioner here asks the god Thonis whether or not he should make the trip upriver and entrust himself to a certain Diogenes and whomever else he might find in Alexandria with respect to some provisional contract.[47] There is, apparently, no more research he can do, no more help to be had from his friends, and whatever he has discovered is insufficient to reach a decision: the only way to cut through the Gordian knot of uncertainty now is to ask the god.[48]

The fact that *meteōra* became a watchword for suspended business could be taken as a sign that radical uncertainty was pervasive in the Roman period. Indeed, Chairemon in BGU II 417 stressed the need to resolve *meteōra* precisely because times were tough, the future uncertain. But we should likely interpret this philological development in precisely the opposite direction: the fact that so many deals and contracts could be left only half-executed, indeed that such a state of limbo could acquire a name, is a testament to the relative certainty parties felt once they were at least halfway there. In fact, the practice of only partially executing and depositing legal documents deeply annoyed the Roman administration, since half-executed contracts were not contracts for which one paid registration taxes.[49] In this phenomenon, then, I suggest that we see an indication that the price of information had come down just far enough for there to be an increase in the beginnings of transactions: a high failure rate at the midpoint likely signals an increase in the base rate of attempts, and perhaps even suggests a rise in the rate of completed transactions.

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47 Reading φοβοῦμ[α]ι ἐμβο|λῆς with the *ed. pr.* results in both a grammatical solipsism (as the editor notes, φοβεῖσθαι with a genitive object is virtually unattested), and a very odd anacolouthon, with "and I am afraid for the shipment" standing more or less parenthetically to the main clause, quite unusual for a ticket oracle. Instead, it seems likely that καί is connecting two, closely joined objects of χάριν. The trace beneath the lacuna in μ[ο]ῳ could be the bottom of an upsilon, with the ligatured -ου- of μου similar to that in φοβοῦ. My thanks to Dr. Robert Daniel of the Papyrussammlung Köln for confirming this reading for me by autopsy. It is possible that ἐμβολή carries some other meaning here: the editor tentatively suggests 'attack.' See P.Oxy. L 3590 for another Oxyrhynchite oracle ticket to Thonis possibly concerning the same pair of protagonists.

48 Cf. P.Louvre II 99 (Oxyrhynchus?, beginning of 2nd c. CE), a letter illustrating both the potential ambivalence or fence-sitting that left many deals 'up in the air' and the lengths to which some parties went in order to nail them down.

49 Cf. P.Oxy. II 238 (Oxyrhynchus, 72 CE) and XXXIV 2705 (Oxyrhynchus, ca. 225 CE) with Gerald M. Browne, "Ad P.Oxy. XXXIV 2705," in *Akten des XIII. Internationalen Papyrologenkongresses. Marburg/Lahn, 2. bis 6. August 1971*, ed. Emil Kiessling and Hans-Albert Rupprecht (Munich: Beck), 53–59.

We have now arrived at our main historical question: can we see diachronic change with respect to the information function of our oracular texts?

As with many of the Roman examples, older oracular texts also tend to center on the perennial questions of travel, love, and health, or ask the location of and responsibility for things that were stolen. Many of the economic questions either revolve around the environment (e.g., P.Oxford.Griffith 1 and 2 [Soknopaiou Nesos, 149/148 or 138/137 BCE], demotic ticket-oracles which ask whether one should plant or sow in a particular location) or are large, open-ended questions. Typical of the latter are the following from the fifth and fourth centuries BCE Dodona in Greece:

> περὶ πανπασίο αὐτοῦ | καὶ γενεᾶς καὶ γυναικὸ-|ς τίνι θεῦν εὐχόμενος | πράσσοιμι ἀγαθόν;
>
> Concerning all my property and my offspring and my wife, by praying to which of the gods may I do well? (Fifth century BCE)[50]
>
> θεός. τύχαι ἀγαθᾶι. Φαινύλωι θεμιστεύει ὁ | θεὸς τὰμ πατρῶιαν τέχναν ἐργάζεσθαι, ἁλιεύεσθαι, | καὶ λώιον καὶ ἄμεινον πράξειν;
>
> God. For good fortune. Does the god rule that Phainylos should pursue his father's craft, should fish, and so will do better? (Fourth century BCE)[51]
>
> θεοί. τύχη ἀγαθή. | Ἀρίζηλος ἐπανερωτᾶι τὸν θεὸν | ὅ τι δρῶν ἢ ποιῶν λώιον καὶ ἄμεινον | ἔσται αὐτῶι καὶ χρημάτων κτῆσις ἀγαθὴ ἔσται.
>
> Gods. Good Fortune. Arizelos asks the god by doing or making what thing will it be better for him and he successfully acquire property? (Fourth century BCE)[52]

This is not to say that one cannot find specific, focused economic questions in pre-Roman oracles from both Greece and Egypt. Take the following, for example:

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50 Eidinow, *Oracles*, 108; I print the Greek text of Herbert W. Parke, *The Oracles of Zeus: Dodona, Olympia, Ammon* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1967), 264. The Greek vacillates between the third and first persons, which while not unprecendented may also explain why this question was never folded and perhaps never submitted: any answer to a question as complex and contingent as this would necessarily admit of multiple interpretations.

51 Eidinow, *Oracles*, 96; Parke, *Oracles of Zeus*, 269.

52 Eidinow, *Oracles*, 99; I print the Greek text of Parke, *Oracles of Zeus*, 271.

> Černý 25: "This calf, is it good such that I should accept it?" (Deir el-Medîna, Dynasties XIX–XX)[53]
>
> Černý 64: "Are they good, the 20 deben of copper?" (Deir el-Medîna, Dynasties XIX–XX)[54]
>
> θεός. τύχη. ἐπικοινῆται Ἀλκίνοος τῶι | Διὶ τῶι Ναίωι καὶ τᾶι Διώναι εἰ λ[ώιον] | καὶ ἄμεινον Νικέαι κατασκευάζ[ειν] | τὸ ἐργαστήριον.
>
> God. Fortune. Alkinoos puts it to Zeus Naios and Dione whether it is better for Nikeas to build the workshop. (Fourth century BCE)[55]
>
> P.Oxford.Griffith 11, a mid-second century BCE demotic ticket-oracle from Soknopaiou Nesos, asks whether or not the enquirer should travel on account of some wood.
>
> P.Mil.Vogl. III Dem. 6, another second-century BCE demotic ticket-oracle, but from Tebtynis, asks whether the enquirer should lease or buy a particular wooded lot.

One could multiply the number of such examples, but looking to the mass of surviving texts as a whole one discerns a qualitative difference between earlier oracles and those from the Roman period when it comes to the scope and nature of the economic questions: the latter tend to be narrower, more specific, and reflect a more complex set of institutional variables informing the decision to be made. The Romans were of course powerless to make it clearer whom one should marry or to render the weather or Nile flood more predictable (e.g., P.Sarap. 83a [Hermopolite, 90–133 CE]); but they did quite a bit to make more information available to buyers and creditors and anyone enforcing property rights, and this, I suggest, was the proximate cause driving a qualitative change in the kind of questions put to oracles with respect to economic decisions.

This is not an argument for which one can offer conclusive proof. First, we do not have the evidence: we are missing far too many texts from far too many locations in Egypt and across the Mediterranean to have anything like a represesentative sample, much less a full corpus. A 'complete'

53 Jaroslav Černý, "Nouvelle Série de Questions adressées aux oracles," *BIFAO* 41 (1942): 15.

54 Valbelle and Husson, "Les questions oraculaires d'Égypte," 1059.

55 Eidinow, *Oracles*, 109; Parke, *Oracles of Zeus*, 269.

catalog of published texts would prove nothing.[56] Second, the criteria for 'specificity' or 'narrowness' would seem, in the end, to be too subjective to be persuasive, a criticism recently leveled at just such an attempt at categorizing and quantifying oracular questions.[57] One must therefore make a more circumstantial, impressionistic case. That said, this is an impression shared by quite a few other scholars, who have noted a concentration of 'economic' questions in Roman period oracles.[58] It may seem obvious that questions in the Roman period should reflect Roman conditions, and yet this challenges a basic assumption of timelessness with which many approach the study of ancient oracles in Egypt.[59] Moreover, as the discussion below will show, what is distinctively Roman about these economic oracles is precisely the extent to which they depend on or seek out knowledge specifically connected to Roman institutions.

Finally, we should not expect a neatly linear development. Although there is a case to be made that in absolute terms the Roman period represented an institutional high-water mark, which would translate into a corresponding nadir in the relative levels of transaction costs, the actual levels of transaction costs at any point in time reflected complex political and institutional developments in a history that is by no means defined by the teleological progress of efficiency. If divination has proved itself to be "one of the most dynamic features of a culture,... in complex times creatively reaching out to

56 Luckily, there are dozens, perhaps hundreds of texts awaiting publication: Willy Clarysse, review of Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi* in *BASP* 48 (2011): 294. Joachim F. Quack recently presented some very interesting demotic divinatory texts from the Roman period, including some that seem to be lot oracles ("A Black Cat from the Right, and a Scarab on your Head," *Through a Glass Darkly: Magic, Dreams, and Prophecy in Ancient Egypt*, ed. Kasia Szpakowsak [Swansea: The Classical Press of Wales, 2006], 182–84). With respect to divinatory texts yet to be published he cautions that "we are still in for a lot of surprises" (175).

57 See Clarysse, review of Naether, 294.

58 Cf., e.g., Valbelle and Husson, "Les questions oraculaires d'Égypte," 1065–66, who suggest that economic questions loom larger in the Sortes Astrampsychi than in the ticket oracles, which they see as dominated by agricultural concerns. If true, this may speak to differences in clientele; but it may also be an artifact of the evidence: there are plenty of non-agricultural ticket oracles from Oxyrhynchus, a nome capital (discussed below), while it is utterly unsurprising to have a large number of agricultural questions from places like Soknopaiou Nesos, a temple village at the edge of a nome where agriculture was particularly challenging (Deborah Hobson, "Agricultural Land and Economic Life in Soknopaiou Nesos," *BASP* 21 [1984]: 89–109). See also Quack, "A Black Cat," 177 who notes the high percentage of 'economic' concerns (among which he also includes legal questions) in our oracular texts and the 'optimistic' character of most of the prognoses.

59 See Tallet, "Oracles," 401 for a recent example.

new materials and idioms to aid people's transition to new social realities," we should expect a corresponding set of changes in oracular texts as petitioners responded and adapted to the fluctuating amount and quality of information and uncertainty in their economic lives.[60] For instance, it is not particularly surprising to see a New Kingdom question about the purity of metal (Černý 64 above): standardized coinage had not yet been introduced. It would, however, be a surprising question to find in the first two centuries of the Roman period, which had a remarkably stable, fiduciary money supply supervised by the state.[61] The case here, then, is necessarily provisional, a hypothesis to be borne in mind as more texts are published and we build a fuller record of oracular practice in Egypt and the rest of the Mediterranean world.

But let's make a case study of one of the areas in which the Romans clearly affected the cost of information and trace what one might see as the concomitant changes in oracular practice: legal cases. Suits can be a source of uncertainty for many reasons, not least the inability to judge the merits and value of one's case. Hence, we find one Roman ticket-oracle asking simply whether or not "we have a case" (εἰ οὐ λόγον ἔχομεν, τοῦτόν | μοι ἔνεγκε).[62] Another from the second or third century (SB X 10569, Soknopaiou Nesos?) has a petitioner wondering if the judge or official (*archōn*) is so ill-disposed towards him that he should

60 Frankfurter, "Voices, Books, and Dreams," 235. The New Kingdom ticket oracles assembled and translated by Valbelle and Husson ("Les questions oraculaires d'Égypte," 1057–60) are interesting in this regard, in light of B. P. Muhs' recent argument that the New Kingdom represented an earlier relative low point in transaction costs ("Transaction Costs and Institutional Change in Egypt, ca. 1070–525 B.C.E," in Kehoe et al., *Law and Transaction Costs in the Ancient Economy* [Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press], 80–98). One would very much like to have similar texts from other periods for comparison, especially from ones of relative disorder or increasing transaction costs. I argue below that the textual tradition of Sortes Astrampsychi can be read in just this way.

61 For the monetary system of Roman Egypt, see: Kenneth W. Harl, *Coinage in the Roman Economy, 300 B.C. to A.D. 700* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 117–24; Erik Christiansen, *Coinage in Roman Egypt* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2004); and now François Lerouxel, *Le marché du credit dans le monde romain* (*Égypte et Campanie*) (Rome: École française de Rome, 2016). The phenomenon of fakes and forgeries in Roman provincial coinage is complicated, but it is worth noting that the Romans criminalized counterfeiting under the *lex Cornelia de falsis*: see Theodor Mommsen, *Römisches Strafrecht* (Leipzig: Dunker & Humblot, 1899), 672–74; Raphael Taubenschlag, "Münzverbrechen," in *PW*, 16.1 (1933) 455–57; Philip Grierson, "The Roman Law of Counterfeiting," in *Essays in Roman Coinage: Presented to Harold Mattingly*, eds. R. A. G. Carson and C. H. V. Sutherland (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1956), 240–61; and Maria P. Piazza, *La disciplina del falso nel diritto romano* (Milan: CEDAM, 1991).

62 SB XVIII 14044: Azza S. Aly, "Eight Greek Oracular Questions in the West Berlin Collection," *ZPE* 68 (1987): 99–104.

engage a *grammatikos* (presumably for professional help in preparing his case). One could similarly ask the Sortes Astrampsychi whether one would get a response to a petition (question 45); whether one was safe from prosecution (question 29, cf. 53); and whether one would get the opportunity to argue one's case (question 51). There are, by contrast, comparatively few oracular texts from pre-Roman times that ask questions about the legal system;[63] instead, as noted above, oracles were part of the legal system in Egypt: guilt or innocence and questions of property rights were decided directly by a public appeal to the god as judge. This difference no doubt stems from the fact that the legal system had never been as predictable or professional in the history of Egypt. The Romans embraced the network of notarial offices, or *grapheia*, they had inherited from the Ptolemies and integrated them into a provincial system of archives, making documents more enforceable and information about documents more reliable and available;[64] lawyers and advocates can be seen operating routinely and effectively in the courts;[65] officials published and advertised written decisions, a necessary precondition for the establishment of a system of precedent;[66] and central record offices open up in Alexandria, whither all manner of documents flowed, available to the public for legal research.[67] We

63 Cf. Eidinow, *Oracles*, 103, no. 11 (350–330 BCE).

64 On the development of the *grapheia*, see now W. Graham Claytor, "Mechanics of Empire: the Karanis Register and the Writing Offices of Roman Egypt" (PhD diss., University of Michigan, 2014). Cf. Hans Julius Wolff, *Das Recht der griechischen Papyri Ägyptens in der Zeit der Ptolemäer und des Prinzipats. Organization und Kontrolle des privaten Rechtverkehrs*. (Munich: Beck, 1978), 13–25, cf. 28–29, 91–95 on the re-organization of the Alexandrian *katalogeion*. Cf. n. 64 below.

65 Raphael Taubenschlag, *The Law of Greco-Roman Egypt in the Light of the Papyri 332 B.C.–640 A.D.* 2nd ed. (Warsaw: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 1955), 517–18, with examples and literature (but who, as is often the case, does not distinguish sufficiently between the Ptolemaic and Roman periods); cf. P.Oxy. XXXVI 2757.ii (Oxyrhynchus, post 79 CE) and the evidence from fourth-century memoranda for advocates, e.g., P.Col. VII 174 (Karanis, ca. 325–350). On the rhetorical skill and training of Roman lawyers in Egypt, see John A. Crook, *Legal Advocacy in the Roman World* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1995). For a different perspective, see Ari Bryen, "Judging Empire: Courts and Culture in Rome's Eastern Provinces," *Law and History Review* 30 (2012): 771–811.

66 See Herbert F. Jolowicz, "Case Law in Roman Egypt," *Journal of the Society of Public Teachers of Law* 14 (1937): 1–16; Ranon Katzoff, "Precedent in the Courts of Roman Egypt," *ZRG* 89 (1972): 256–92; and Ernest Metzger, "Roman judges, case law, and principles of procedure," *Law and History Review* 22 (2004): 243–75; cf. Bryen, "Judging Empire."

67 See, e.g., Fabienne Burkhalter, "Archives locales et archives centrales en Égypte romaine," *Chiron* 20 (1990): 191–216, Rudolf Haensch, "Die Bearbeitungsweisen von Petitionen in der Provinz Aegyptus," *ZPE* 100 (1994): 487–546, and now Claytor, "Mechanics of Empire," ch. 3. Cf. Andrea Jördens, *Statthalterliche Verwaltung in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2009) on Roman information policy and control more broadly and

may see fruits of such investments in legal institutions in a second-century private account from Oxyrhynchus (P.Oxy. XIV 1654), which details expenses related to the searching, pulling, and copying of documents out of official archives in Alexandria over the course of four days. In this connection we may also point to the justly famous petition of Dionysia (P.Oxy. II 237) as an illuminating example of the quality of legal help one could retain in the Roman period: Dionysia's crack team of lawyers argue from a host of well-researched precedents and demonstrate an impressive command over a very complicated paper trail left by Dionysia's duplicitous father. My brokerage firm continually reminds me that "past performance is no guarantee of future results," but past performance nonetheless remains the best guide to the future, and the Romans did a comparatively good job of making a reliable record of past legal performance available to its subjects.

It was this institutional environment that helped to hone the ticket-oracle and (as we will see in the next section) the original version of the Sortes Astrampsychi into very specific tools designed to ferret out the last bit of information and quell the last remaining bit of anxiety. Indeed, it was the expansion of an individual's ability to chart the past and assess the present that whittled the questions one asked the gods about the future down to examples like P.Oxy. LV 3799 (Oxyrhynchus, 2nd–3rd c. CE):

> κύριε, εἰ συνφέρον
> ἐστὶ προσελθεῖν ἡμᾶς
> τῶι ἡγεμόνι μεθ' ὑ-
> περβολίου περὶ τὴς
> τεσσαρακοστῆς καὶ κυ-
> ρωθήσεται ἡμεῖν,
> τοῦτο τὸ πιττάκιν ἔνεγκ(ον).
>
> Lord, if it is advantageous that we apply to the governor with a higher tender for the 2.5% tax and it will be accepted, bring this chit (out).

We should pause and reflect on the significance of this text. Here we have a highly focused question about pricing, one which suggests that the petitioner had already gathered quite a bit of information about the other bidders and

Rudolf Haensch, *Capita provinciarum: Statthaltersitze und Provinzialverwaltung in der römischen Kaiserzeit* (Mainz am Rhein: Zabern, 1997) on archives elsewhere in the Roman world.

the recent pricing history of tax-farming contracts.[68] Once one reaches this point, the only rational way forward (short of rigging the auction) is to adopt a completely different attitude towards decision-making, to move from a research stance to a probabilistic one, which is to embrace uncertainty itself. Yet probability and the concept of risk are intellectual descendants of the Renaissance: the ancients thought in terms of 'danger' (κίνδυνος, cf. *periculum*), which was assignable (as we may see from legal sources and documentary contracts), but not quantifiable.[69] So, the boundary between the knowable and the probable, or where we cease our search for information and call in the economist or actuary to help us understand the ramifying possibilities of the future, was essentially unrecognized by the ancient individual, who instead pushed his information-seeking into the unknowable by consulting a god.

A final Roman oracular papyrus is worth mentioning in this connection. In SB XII 11227 (Soknopaiou Nesos, 2nd c. CE) a man asks whether or not he would be released from serving as a *praktōr*, a liturgical position responsible for collecting taxes. As the editor noted, candidates for liturgies of different classes of tax collectors were chosen by lot from a list of nominations; and so the burden of serving a second time in office was not uncommon. "Therefore one can very well understand the uncertainty and distress of the questioner, whose fate lay entirely in the hands of a merciful or merciless Tyche."[70] This conclusion is perhaps truer than the editor intended. The Roman government was becoming, through its various activities, a new source of economic uncertainty even as it mitigated older ones. It was itself, in other words, becoming the focus of economic chance, though not, of course, to the extent that governments have become in the contemporary world.[71]

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68 Cf. Eidenow, *Oracles*, 103, no. 9 (Dodona, 400–375 BCE), sadly incomplete. Pricing and price information in classical Greece presented particular problems, solved by an interesting set of institutions aimed at eliciting contested subjective valuations: see Johnstone, *A History of Trust*, 81–110. On the *tessarakostē* tax, see SB XIV 11905 (unknown, 2nd c. CE), P.Oxy. XLIII 3104 (Oxyrhynchus, 228 CE); cf. SB XXII 15766 (Arsinoite nome, 223 or 181 BCE), on which see Martin Müller, "A Circular Letter and a Memo (P. Mich. Inv. 6980)," *ZPE* 105 (1995): 240.

69 Cf. n. 22 above.

70 Albert Heinrichs, "Zwei Orakelfragen." *ZPE* 11 (1973): 119: "Man kann also die Ungewissheit und Not des Fragestellers, dessen Schicksal gänzlich in der Hand einer gnädigen oder ungnädigen Tyche lag, sehr gut verstehen."

71 We may see a similar phenomenon in other periods characterized by a strong centralized government or in communities largely dependent on government, like that of the workmen at Deir el-Medîna in the New Kingdom: see the oracle texts related to work collected in Valbelle and Husson, "Les questions oraculaires d'Égypte," 1057–58. The Roman system created other anxieties as well, such as the possibility of being investigated: e.g., SB XVL 16731 (Soknopaiou Nesos, 2nd c. CE); P.Lond. III 1267d (Arsinoite, 2nd c. CE),

3 The Sortes Astrampsychi and Measuring Ancient Economic Confidence

Unlike the ticket-oracles, which are fairly well rooted in a particular social and cultural context, the Sortes Astrampsychi is much more enigmatic and challenging: virtually everything we know begins and ends with the text itself.[72] The text is transmitted through two medieval manuscript traditions and attested by several papyrological fragments dating from the late second to sixth centuries. Together, the papyrological and internal evidence suggest that the Sortes Astrampsychi first came into use in Egypt around the turn of the third century; whether it was composed in Egypt or not remains an open question. All of the papyri appear to preserve a version of the text prior to that which generated the medieval recensions.[73] We do not, therefore, have a complete witness of the Sortes Astrampsychi from the Roman period. Yet the papyri illuminate a significant feature of the text's subsequent history: they show that one medieval tradition preserves what appears to have been the standard ordering of the questions and responses in the Roman period, while the other tradition preserves the language of the Roman-era responses. This happy coincidence allows us to triangulate between the papyri and the medieval texts and reconstruct the text as it appears to have circulated in the late second and early third centuries. This is precisely what Randall Stewart has done in his Teubner edition of the Sortes Astrampsychi.[74] If one's object

on which see J. David Thomas, *The epistrategos in Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt. Part 2: The Roman epistrategos* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1982), 177.

72 The major arguments from the internal evidence as to date, modes of use, and clientele are rehearsed in Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, esp. 85–96, 99–106, 126–36, 276–78.

73 Randall Stewart, "The Textual Transmission of the *Sortes Astrampsychi*," *ICS* 20 (1995): 135–47; cf. Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 75–82, 107–8.

74 Randall Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. 2. (Munich: Teubner, 2001). Authorities differ on whether or not one can construct a scientific text of the Roman Sortes Astrampsychi: see Pieter W. van der Horst, review of Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi, BMCR* (2001), http://bmcr.brynmawr.edu/2001/2001-10-04.html, and Kai Brodersen, *Astrampsychos: Das Pythagoras-Orakel* (Darmstadt: WGB, 2006), 19–20; cf. Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 107–8. The argument stems from the underlying assumptions about the status and life of this text in antiquity, i.e., should we treat the Sortes Astrampsychi as a 'text' that was 'redacted,' and for which one can construct a stemma, or should we see it as a series of texts that stand in a fluid relationship to each and so defy any attempt at systematization? My argument does not depend on the outcome of this debate (nor am I convinced that it is properly delineated). For what follows it suffices that the papyri assure us of the general character of the Roman-period language, while the medieval texts exhibit a specific tendency for that language to change in a consistent way. It is also worth pointing out that in comparison to

is to place the Sortes Astrampsychi in its Roman context, one's best – indeed only – option is to work cautiously from Stewart's reconstruction.

What, then, can the Sortes Astrampsychi tell us, if anything, about the institutional environment of the late second or early third century? Michael Rostovtzeff, who was, so far as I know, the first and last person to attempt an economic reading of the Sortes Astrampsychi, saw in it an indication of the deteriorating condition of the propertied élites in the third century. Specifically, he saw the concerns reflected in the Sortes Astrampsychi as "arising from the interference of the state with the life of the individual."[75] Rostovtzeff was predisposed to find evidence for his larger thesis of the decline of the proto-capitalistic Roman Empire into the statist regime of late antiquity; but more importantly, he did not have anything like as full a picture of the history of the text as we do today.[76] For the reasons above, there is still too little of the original text to undertake a direct analysis; yet the particular ways in which the text changed over time are reasonably clear and can themselves be analyzed. The fact that the economic questions appear to have remained the same from the earlier to the later version, while the responses underwent a specific transformation, means that we may approach the text almost in the manner of a longitudinal poll and interpret the shift in the responses. In other words, the textual history in itself holds the potential to tell us something about changes in attitudes and expectations over time with respect to basic economic decisions concerning business ventures (questions 15, 22, 43, 81), contracting (questions 18, 61, 76), buying and selling (questions 20, 57, 74, 83, 84, 99), credit (questions 25, 26, 58, 71), litigation (questions 29, 45, 63, 67, 69), and the usefulness of oracular information in economic decision-making generally.[77]

We begin from the premise that the text, regardless of the edition, was useful[78] – but useful how? This question can only be answered by analyzing

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many other texts in the papyri, e.g., the Greek novels, the Sortes Astrampsychi is relatively well attested.

75 Michael Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 479–80.

76 On Rostovtzeff's views and their impact on the historiography of the ancient economy, see the essays in Joseph G. Manning and Ian Morris, eds. *The Ancient Economy: Evidence and Models* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005).

77 I omit several questions that are difficult to characterize but nonetheless could be asked primarily for economic reasons, e.g., question 79.

78 This is, in fact, a basic principle of the primary editors, Gerald M. Browne, *The Papyri of the Sortes Astrampsychi* (Meisenheim am Glan: Hain, 1974) and Randall Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, shared by their critics (n. 74 above). Cf. Zeitlyn's assertion that "the evaluative test for diagnosis [i.e., as a divinatory logic] (and divination more generally) is not whether it is correct but whether it helped" ("Divinatory Logics," 537).

the basic structures of the text with an eye to utility. The chief feature of the Roman version of the Sortes Astrampsychi (SA^1) in this respect is, without a doubt, the clarity of its answers. For instance, question 20 in both versions asks: "Will I purchase what's on offer?" (εἰ ἀγοράζω τὸ προκείμενον;). The original (SA^1) responses all seem to have been unambiguous affirmatives or negatives: ἀγοράζεις τὸ προκείμενον (responses 15.7, 18.6, 24.3, 27.4, 37.8) or οὐκ ἀγοράζεις τὸ προκείμενον (responses 8.1, 46.2, 47.10*, 56.9, 71.5, 102.10).[79] We may compare these to the set of responses to the same question in the later, expanded version of the Sortes Astrampsychi (SA^2), in which most were 'padded,' sometimes resulting in what Franziska Naether has neatly called 'bittersweet' responses, since they appear paradoxical or combine a positive and a negative answer (fig. 12.1).[80]

Positive	18.6 (ἐν τάχει, 'soon'), 56.9 (καὶ χαίρῃ, 'and rejoice')
Negative	8.1, 46.2, 47.10*, 71.5 (οὐκ ἐπαρκεῖς, 'you do not have enough'), 102.10 (οὐκ εὐπορεῖς, 'you do not have enough')
Bittersweet	15.7 (ἀγοράζεις τὸ προκείμενον καὶ βλάπτῃ, 'and take a loss/be harmed'), 27.4 (ἀγοράζεις τὸ προκείμενον μετὰ κόπου, 'with effort, difficulty'), 37.8 (ἀγοράζεις τὸ προκείμενον καμάτῳ, 'with effort, difficulty')
Punt	24.3 (ἀγοράζεις τὸ προκείμενον, ἐὰν θέλῃς, 'if you wish')

FIGURE 12.1 Responses to question 20 in SA^2

A good example of a bittersweet response to question 20 in SA^2 is 15.7. The most common text for response 15.7 in SA^1 was almost certainly ἀγοράζεις τὸ προκείμενον ("You will buy the thing offered"). Astrampsychus in SA^2, on the other hand, enigmatically responds with ἀγοράζεις τὸ προκείμενον καὶ βλάπτῃ ("You will buy the thing on offer and take a loss"). From the perspective of the oracle as an informational tool, bittersweet answers (or "punts," i.e., answers which resolve nothing, e.g., 24.3) are nothing short of a disaster: they are not useful answers, which 'free' you from anxiety, so as to get you to 'yes' or 'no.'[81] As Naether put it of SA^2: "He who frequently inquired after certain subjects ran the risk of being haunted by the sarcastic, paradoxical, surprising and dark

79 The asterisk indicates a 'fake' answer, i.e., one that was impossible to get to, used merely to fill out a decade of responses.

80 Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 148–59.

81 Cf. Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 194: "Rekompensation [i.e., bittersweet answers] stiftet emotionale Unruhe, Verwirrung und kann den Blick in die Zukunft mit Angst erfüllen."

side of Astrampsychus more often than not."[82] No doubt SA[2], with its padded and bittersweet responses, was still useful in some fashion to the clientele who clearly sought it out and were responsible for its being copied generation after generation; but it seems safe to say that its practical, economic decision-making utility had decreased.[83]

The comparative clarity of SA[1] may also tell us something about what we might call the level of relative economic confidence in the late second or early third centuries. First, we should presume that the Sortes Astrampsychi in all versions – like any successful oracle – reflects a conservative bias with respect to its predictions: no oracle can be obviously wrong too often and retain its credibility. With its characteristically declarative answers, SA[1] left itself exposed: 'Delphic' is not the word that comes to mind when one reads over the answers in the Roman-period text. This clarity was no doubt a selling point and one of the factors supporting the oracle's evident popularity in the Roman period. All the more reason, then, to suspect that the risk this clarity presented to the oracle-seller was offset by some self-protective engineering

82 Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 159: "Wer bestimmte Themen häufig nachfragte, lief Gefahr, öfter von der sarkastischen, paradoxen, überraschenden und dunklen Seite des Astramspychos heimgesucht zu werden als andere."

83 It must be admitted that we know nothing of the ways in which the diviner of the Sortes Astrampsychi acted as a guide in helping to choose questions or framing the responses, or how he may have helped to make meaning out of contradictory or confusing answers (cf. n85 below). The potential importance of this missing dynamic cannot be underestimated: indeed, it is central to the current anthropology of divination: see Zeitlyn, "Divination as dialogue" (in which he makes a comparative argument about the production of divinatory meaning from Garfinkel's experiments with students asking other students questions over an intercom, who received more or less random binary, "yes" or "no" responses); idem, "Finding Meaning in the Text: The Process of Interpretation in Text-Based Divination Author(s)," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 7 (2001): 225–240; and Zeitlyn, "Divinatory Logics," esp. 532, 540–541 with special relevance to the Sortes Astrampsychi. We do, however, have one clue as to the hermeneutic framework of the client-diviner interaction: the fact that the Sortes had a mechanism that discouraged repeated consultation (see below) suggests a very different mode of consultation and interpretation from, say, the African forms of divination Zeitlyn discusses, which depend on making meaning from a series of questions, including ones meant to calibrate the oracular quality of the responses (e.g., "Diviniation as Dialogue," 201). The built-in "defensive" mechanism of the Sortes Astrampsychi, which discourages precisely this process of iterative consultation, thus represents an artifact of diviner-client relations and is suggestive as to the way in which the "utility" or "helpfulness" of this lot oracle was understood: however meaning was constructed from the responses, it was *not* through the concatenation or synthesis of multiple responses.

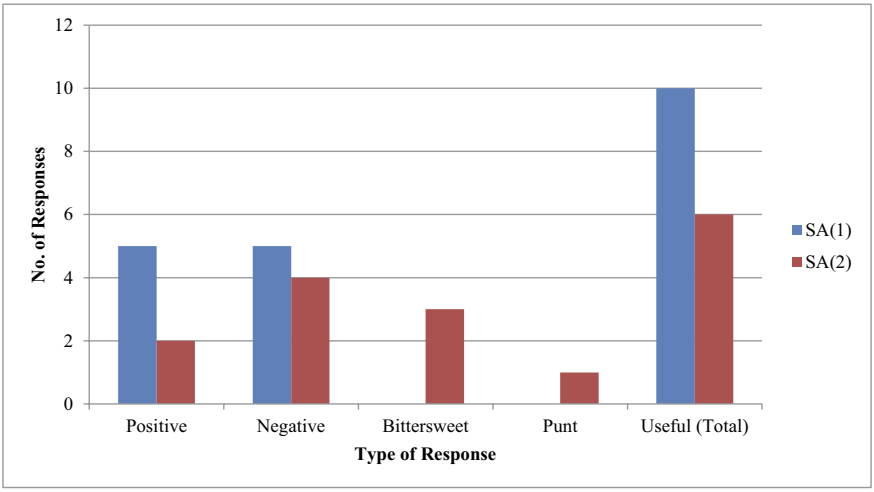

FIGURE 12.2 Typology and Change in Distribution of Responses to question 20 from SA^1 to SA^2

in the responses.[84] In this light, the relative clarity of SA^1 in itself bespeaks a certain level of predictability or confidence in economic matters, just as Plutarch argued.[85]

If we return to question 20, we find that the Roman Astrampsychus saw it as even money when it came to predicting whether a client should go through with the purchase (fig. 12.2). If we assume that clients generally consulted the oracle only for the occasional, perhaps less common or extraordinary transaction – in other words, those cases in which they could not make up their minds by themselves and were therefore willing to pay for a consultation – the distribution of responses suggests that Astrampsychus saw it as a relatively safe bet on his part that things would work out *for him* if he said 'yes' at least half the time. It is significant that the client's response to irreducible uncertainty was not to abandon the purchase, but to consult the oracle in the knowledge

84 Since the questions were set and the SA^1 responses tended to be precise, one imagines that the most common justification for what turned out to have been bad advice was to consider that one had asked the wrong question, i.e., that the client conceived of his problem incorrectly and should have chosen a different generic question. See below on the consultation calendar as another built-in defense mechanism.

85 One may compare this to the more enigmatic answers of other lot oracles which do not pre-select the questions, like the dice oracles from Asia: Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 209–10, 238; Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 281–82. Being public, these oracles were presumably free (however, one might have needed to pay someone to read it or interpret it).

that it might very well say 'yes.' This in itself reveals some appetite for risk on the part of clients: only gamblers roll dice. We should therefore understand the responses to question 20 in SA[1] as indicating that clients in Roman Egypt were fairly bullish on purchasing whatever they had in mind, perhaps 60:40 on average, if we interpret the oracle's 5:5 stance as having a defensive margin built in against being wrong (i.e., *ceteris paribus*, clients are inclined to make 6 out of every 10 such dubious purchases, but the oracle plays it safe by saying 'no' a bit more frequently, since it knows nothing about any specific transaction). Furthermore, we should consider that this bullishness reflected in part the information available to potential purchasers, since this was presumably the chief basis of their confidence. A crucial assumption in all this is that the oracle sits at the center of a feedback loop: oracle sellers adjust from time to time the ratio of positive to negative answers in response to client feedback.
It is worth modeling this set of observations somewhat more formally.[86] Let us assume the following in our analysis of the response set to question 20:

Assumption 1: The oracle is more concerned about being obviously wrong than about being right, such that it is engineered in the first instance to avoid telling a client to buy when he should hold (i.e., not buy). In other words, false negatives, or telling a client to hold when he should buy, are acceptable: it was almost always satisfactory for the client to hold, and moreover it would have been difficult for him to ascertain that holding had been the wrong decision. To do so, the client would have had to be certain that the deal he had passed up turned out in fact to have been better than holding or making a different purchase. This is a certainty that can be difficult to achieve even now, much less in Roman Egypt. Regretting a bad purchase, on the other hand, is much easier psychologically and leads directly to the suspicion that the oracle gives false answers.[87] A default preference for holding is not some quirk of a premodern economic *mentalité*, but a well-studied phenomenon in behavioral economics, which helps to explain why the standard neoclassical preference theory, which assumes that agents have rational preferences for outcomes that maximize utility, does not always hold. Instead of perfectly informed, rational, utility-maximizing agents, what we usually find in the marketplace are human beings who "demand much more to give up an object than they would be willing to pay to acquire it" (the endowment effect); who demonstrate a status quo bias, or a preference for the current state over entering any transaction (something like

86 The following model is admittedly far too simplistic, but it suffices here to illuminate the basic economic role and effect of the Sortes Astrampsychi. I am exploring a more rigorous mathematical model of the Sortes Astrampsychi.

87 Cf. n. 84 above.

a transactional coefficient of friction); and who exhibit a specific asymmetry of value, whereby the apparent "disutility of giving up an object is greater that the utility associated with acquiring it" (loss aversion).[88]

> A central conclusion of the study of risky choice has been that such choices are best explained by assuming that the significant carriers of utility are not states of wealth or welfare, but changes relative to a neutral reference point. Another central result is that changes that make things worse (losses) loom larger than improvements or gains.[89]

Hence the oracle's 'conservative' strategy, or balancing the desire to give the positive answers many clients likely wanted against the need to preserve its credibility, which it did in part by taking advantage of the psychology of loss aversion.

Assumption 2: The oracle was a reasonably accurate reflection of client expectations (the core competency of a successful economic oracle, as the Sortes Astrampsychi manifestly was) and clients were, on average, relatively well informed about their personal affairs (a basic assumption behind the value of measuring confidence in modern economies).[90] Whoever composed this set of responses seems to have believed that the clients who came to the oracle to test their appetites for risk probably had good reason to believe their prospective purchases were at least 'good bets,' or, in other words, that clients' belief in this regard was, on average, well founded. This is an important assumption because the Sortes Astrampsychi is nothing more than a mirror of generalized client expectations: it is unable to respond to economic conditions directly or to any particular transaction or market, but channels highly specific queries into generic questions about typical transactions and responds with the aggregated experience of clients, based on their feedback to responses. For example, there are questions relating to borrowing and lending (questions 25–26), because the two sides of the credit market carried different risks and uncertainties. In the case of question 20, let us assume as above that the perceived confidence level gravitated around 60:40:: buy:hold; and further that this perception corresponds in some objective sense to the number of such purchases that should in fact be made (i.e., we are going to

88 Daniel Kahneman, Jack L. Knetsch, and Richard H. Thaler, "Anomalies: The Endowment Effect, Loss Aversion, and Status Quo Bias," *Journal of Economic Perspectives* 5 (1991): 194.

89 Kahneman, Knetsch, and Thaler, "Anomalies," 199.

90 See Zeitlyn, "Divinatory Logics," 534–536 for an exploration of the "divinatory logics" of the contemporary economic forecasting and advice industry.

trust consumer confidence to be correct in the aggregate). More strictly, a 5:5 response distribution implies an approximate perceived confidence range of 55:45 to 64:36. In other words, we should assume that those oracle-sellers who understood how the Sortes Astrampsychi worked would be increasingly tempted to flip one of the answers in the set to 'buy' as client confidence appeared to approach 65 (cf. the extremely bullish response set to question 18, which is 7:3). Conversely, as confidence appeared to sink below 60 and neared 55, the oracle-seller should start to feel pressure through client feedback to flip one of the responses to 'hold.'

Assumption 3: Clients listen to the oracle more often than not. Some percentage of clients of course rejected the oracle's advice (ancient literature is replete with cautionary examples).[91] But since many, and perhaps most, clients likely came to the oracle with an inclination to purchase (as suggested in Assumption 2), we may assume that a slightly greater proportion of negative answers (holds) were rejected than positive ones (buys).[92] That said, consultations came at a price, and as a consequence it seems reasonable to suppose that only truly difficult decisions were brought to the oracle. Also, it appears to be a deep and persistent psychological truth (and certainly the foundation of the modern consulting business, our own oracle industry) that people tend to value the advice they pay for.[93] In the final analysis, it seems best to assume that clients tended to be, on balance, more open to following the oracle's advice than not.[94]

With these three assumptions in place, the first question is: can we say how often the oracle would be manifestly wrong, i.e., how often would it advise someone to buy when he should have held and thus potentially expose its fallibility? The equation is:

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91 There was a healthy amount of well-documented skepticism about oracles and astrology in antiquity (e.g., Cicero *Div.* 11.83), even by those who believed in it (e.g., Artemidorus, *Onir.* 2.69); cf. Winkelman and Peek, "Introduction," 5. Then as now, concerns or questions about the technical skill or proper procedure were perhaps the most common reason for rejecting a particular response, e.g., Zeitlyn, "Divination as Dialogue," 190, 193.

92 It is, however, impossible to be more specific about the relative proportions of rejections, how rejections were justified, or the extent to which clients engaged in 'oracle shopping' (on which, see below).

93 Cf. Francesca Gino, "Do we listen to advice just because we paid for it? The impact of advice cost on its use," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 107 (2008): 234–45. Cf. n90.

94 This disregards the effect of religious or social pressure to follow the oracle's response. Although this might have had a profound effect on particular individuals, it is hard to see how it would lead to a differential rate of fidelity to responses on the basis of content (i.e., positive or negative).

$P_{\text{o, wrong}} = P_{\text{cl, hold}} * P_{\text{o, buy}}$

where

$P_{\text{o, wrong}}$ is the probability of the oracle being manifestly wrong, as defined above in Assumption 1;

$P_{\text{cl, hold}}$ is the probability of the client believing that he should hold; and

$P_{\text{o, buy}}$ is the probability of the oracle telling him to buy.

In our example of question 20, $P_{\text{cl, hold}}$ is 0.4 (i.e., client confidence is approximately 60:40:: buy:hold); $P_{\text{o, buy}}$ is 0.5 (i.e., the oracle response set is 5:5:: buy:hold); and $P_{\text{o, wrong}}$ is therefore 0.2, meaning that SA[1] will advise someone to buy when holding was probably the right response to question 20 approximately 20% of the time. Of course, client confidence is a fuzzy average (Assumption 2 above) and some ill-advised purchases (loans, contracts, etc.) work out fine; so we should not imagine that all of these 'wrong' responses resulted in a disappointed and angry client. The point here is to identify what percentage of the time the oracle puts itself at risk of maximum exposure. Assumption 3 suggests that this number was likely lower, since some clients would reject the oracle's advice, but probably only slightly. Also, it is worth bearing in mind that the oracle had another built-in defense mechanism, which further diluted the possible impact of being wrong: the consultation calendar.[95] This calendar limited the frequency of consultation, and so the 20% error rate would have been less apparent, as one could not ask Astrampsychus the same question multiple times in quick succession.

The next question is the more important one: what is the social effect of consulting a conservative oracle about dubious purchases? In other words, what is, in this admittedly limited and oversimplified model, the overall economic effect of SA[1]? To answer this we must assume that the alternative to consulting Astrampsychus about a dubious transaction was to hold most of the time. In reality, the alternative might have been (and no doubt was in at least some cases) to consult another oracle. Sadly, we have little explicit evidence (at least of which I am aware) as to what, if any, difference Roman clients might have perceived in the kinds of responses they were likely to get from different kinds of oracles, e.g., ticket-oracles at different temples versus Astrampsychus or other lot oracles (assuming equal access), and therefore to what extent clients might have engaged in oracle shopping or how they might have reconciled conflicting oracular responses.[96] Then again, as above,

95 Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 86–91, 140–42, cf. 381.

96 See McDowell, *Jurisdiction*, 133, 134, 137; Tallet, "Oracles," 399 for an attested case of oracle shopping in the New Kingdom (P.Brit.Mus. EA 10335). Jacco Dieleman, "Coping with a

there were some disincentives to oracle shopping in the limitations put on consultation frequency and the fees charged.

If, for the sake of this discussion, we discount the possibility of oracle shopping and take SA^1 as representing sub-élite Roman oracular practice generally (obviously, the economic effect proper to the SA^1 stands in proportion to its share of the oracle 'market'), we may describe three basic scenarios in order to help give us a sense of the economic effect of this institution, and by extension similar oracular practices (see fig. 12.3):

	Scenario 1, no SA^1	**Scenario 2, perfect SA^1**	**Scenario 3, actual SA^1**	**Scenario 4, actual SA^2**
Hypothetical number of possible dubious purchases	100	100	100	100
Perceived confidence level with respect to dubious purchases	60%	60%	60%	30%
Oracle's buy response rate	NA	60%	50%	20%
Number of dubious purchases made	15*	60	50	20
Factor increase in dubious transaction rate over Scenario 1	NA	4x	2.3x	NA
Oracle error rate ($P_{o,\,wrong}$)	NA	24%	20%	14%

* This number is randomly chosen, for the sake of modeling. I am simply assuming that in a world with highly imperfect information and no Sortes Astrampsychi, buyers would only make 25% of the purchases they were inclined to make with a confidence level of 60%.

FIGURE 12.3 Scenarios for question 20, SA^1 and SA^2

Scenario 1. A Roman world without sub-élite, commercial oracles: All would-be clients face radical, irreducible uncertainty with respect to dubious transactions and hold most of the time. For the sake of modeling, let's assume

Difficult Life: Magic, Healing, and Sacred Knowledge," in Riggs, *Handbook*, 339 astutely points out that in the Roman period, with its multiplicity of oracular sources, competition was bound to be greater than in the Pharaonic period, thus driving, we should suspect, some degree of oracle shopping; cf. Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 213–15 on the oracle market.

that potential clients would only go for a quarter (i.e., 15) of the 60 dubious purchases they are inclined to make, assuming a 60% confidence level.

Scenario 2. A Roman world with sub-élite, commercial oracles that have both the capacity and the desire to track client confidence exactly (*i.e., they are not conservative*): Clients are told to commit at the limit of the general confidence level. There will be a number of false positives and false negatives, which will cancel each other out to some extent, since clients are not perfectly informed (which is why they consulted the oracle in the first place); and the oracle will be noticeably wrong more frequently (e.g., for question 20 approaching a quarter of the time), which may eventually erode trust (one of the problems Plutarch had to address). However, for as long as it maintains its credibility, the maximum number of transactions in this marginal category of dubious transactions will be made, and a number of them will be efficient, or exchanges in which both sides reap the gains of trade, such that the overall product of society is increased.[97] There is no necessity that the number of efficient transactions will outweigh the number of inefficient ones (after all, these are by definition dubious transactions), except that we are assuming that relatively well-informed clients came to the oracle precisely in order to find a way to say 'yes' to a deal after doing their initial due diligence (Assumption 2); and if so, the chances are that more efficient transactions will be made on average than inefficient ones.

Scenario 3. A Roman world with sub-élite, commercial oracles like SA¹: So long as Assumption 3 holds, clients will in the case of question 20 make purchases approximately 50% of the time (indeed, we might expect the number to be a bit higher, if clients were more likely to reject advice to hold than to buy). However, this represents approximately 17% fewer purchases in this marginal category than would be made under Scenario 2 (i.e., reflecting the decline from 60% to 50% in the rate of buy responses). This is the cost of maintaining the oracle's credibility, or the price of supporting a more sustainable economic institution. Significantly, the conservative oracle still facilitates approximately double the number of dubious purchases for which clients are willing to pay for an oracular consultation than under the conditions of Scenario 1.

Lot oracles of the Roman period, as modeled on SA¹, are thus revealed as potentially economically efficient institutions, since they helped individuals who had exhausted their mundane sources of information but still had an

97 For an example and explanation of economic efficiency in exchanges, see Anthony T. Kronman and Richard A. Posner, *The Economics of Contract Law* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co., 1979), 1–2. An "efficient" institution is one in which "maximizing behavior on the part of the participants will produce increases in output; [an inefficient one] will not produce increases in output" (Douglass C. North, *Structure and Change in Economic History* [New York: Norton, 1981], 7 n. 2).

inclination toward purchasing to accept greater risk for the additional gains of marginal transactions. It is important here to reiterate that the opportunity cost is not defined as we often think of it, i.e., between a set of alternate and mutually exclusive transactions, so much as between transacting and sitting on cash, which represents a loss to the economy, since among those unrealized dubious transaction are doubtlessly a good number of efficient ones.

What if we now compare these findings to the same question in SA^2 (*Scenario 4*)? According the data represented in fig. 12.2 above, there are in the SA^2 response set to question 20 two unambiguously positive, three bittersweet, four outright negative responses, and one 'punt' (essentially a non-answer). One could interpret this distribution as indicating a different version of original 5:5 response distribution or even perhaps an increase to 6:4, since the bittersweet answers and the punt say that the client is to buy, even if he will suffer for it or buy it "with difficulty" (i.e., responses 18.6, 56.9; 15.7, 27.4, 37.8; 24.3). Alternatively, one could, as seems more reasonable, believe that a client who receives bittersweet answers or is told "you will buy it, if you wish" (response 24.3) is substantially less likely to go through with the purchase. If so, we see a substantial decrease in the perceived level of client confidence, in that the oracle is only willing to say 'yes' unambiguously 20% of the time. By the same reasoning as above, this implies that the oracle believes the confidence level is something like 30%. If this is roughly correct, $P_{\text{o, wrong, }SA^2}$ is 14% ($P_{\text{cl, hold, }SA^2}$ is 0.7; $P_{\text{o, buy, }SA^2}$ is 0.2), an error rate which is close to that of SA^1, but clearly more conservative.

While it is true that many more purchases are likely to be made in a world in which a client consults SA^1 instead of SA^2, it is equally true that both versions are adapted to the confidence levels of their respective worlds and, significantly, both worlds are better off economically with the Sortes Astrampsychi than without. With respect to SA^2, it is interesting to note not only an apparent decline in confidence, but also that some of the answers appear to be drifting away from the original sense of the question, as we see here in question 20. For example, response 24.3 adds to the response "if you wish" (ἐὰν θέλῃς)[98] – but this is precisely what one imagines one went to discover from Astrampsychus in the first place! Even more odd are responses 71.5 and 102.10, which tell the client that he does not have enough money. This makes nonsense of the original question, which seems to presume that the client is inquiring about a particular purchase he is contemplating, "Will I buy what is on offer?" (τὸ προκείμενον).[99]

98 For other responses with this qualification, see Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 185 (but note that response 24.3 has been omitted).

99 LSJ, s.v. προτίθημι II.2; cf. Lewis and Short, *A Latin Dictionary*, s.v. *propono* 1b.

Whereas the answers in SA[1] suggest that the client came to the oracle to determine whether he ought to accept a certain offer, these particular answers in SA[2] suggest that the later client may have some doubts as to his capacity to pay. One may see a parallel to this in question 18, "Is it to my advantage to enter into an agreement?" (εἰ συναλλάξαι συμφέρει μοι;). Response 18.8 in SA[1] is: "You will not conclude a contract now" (οὐ συναλλάσσεις ἄρτι). This is revised in SA[2] to: "You will not contract now with anyone" (οὐ συναλλάσσεις ἄρτι οὐδενί). As in the previous example, Astrampsychus has seemingly re-interpreted a question that was originally about a particular contract to be one about contracting per se, namely, "Is it a good time to enter into contracts (i.e., with anyone)?"

4 Conclusion

The standard view of oracles in the Roman period is that the questions remained more or less the same, being of a timeless nature, while divinatory media evolved as Roman policy and power worked to transform traditional relationships to the divine and the institutions that mediated those relationships. The result was a growing bifurcation of divinatory practice into parallel tracks: the high-status, traditional oracles located in temples or cult centers and the 'emancipated' or 'mobile' oracles of the sub-élite.[100] David Frankfurter has argued forcefully and influentially against such a vision, insisting that in Egypt at least "the diversification in the media of divination still depended on a center and a tradition, and that one cannot understand mantic innovation unless one takes seriously the traditions and even places to which those innovations make reference."[101] Accordingly, he has attempted to tie the various forms of divination in the Roman period back to an enduring sacred landscape and traditional priestly class. He has likewise argued against "the putative 'individualism' of oracular questions and rites in the Roman period," seeing it as "merely reflect[ing] the basic function of any divination system, which articulates and reconciles individuals' concerns within a traditional cosmology and ritual system … The oracle 'tickets' of the third-century Fayyum are no more individualistic than those from Deir el-Medina … in classical Egypt."[102]

100 Lane Fox. *Pagans and Christians*, 215–22; cf. Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 287–88.

101 Frankfurter, "Voices, Books, and Dreams," 234.

102 David Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 176–77.

As a student of institutions and institutional change, I am naturally sympathetic to arguments that begin from the premise of path dependency, which is the foundation of Frankfurter's approach; but a necessary corollary to path dependency is the fact that systemic change proceeds simultaneously along multiple axes. So, Frankfurter suggests that the growth and diversification of oracles were an adaptation to the withdrawal of state support over the Roman period, as temples moved to something like a fee-for-service model: "But an oracle cult provided a particular service, and one of extraordinary utility in a society undergoing rapid economic change: divination."[103] But why should utility remain static in such a society any more than temple revenue streams? The perception of utility was, as I have argued above, intimately linked to many of the same economic and bureaucratic forces reshaping the practices and landscape of cult, and there is now a growing body of work that reveals how Egyptians responded to the institutional changes of the Roman period. One of the most elegant examples is François Lerouxel's recent work on the *bibliothēkē engktēson*, a property-record office established in the late first-century office, likely for fiscal reasons, but which effectively reduced the cost of information about property put up for security (e.g., quality of title, equity left in the property, encumbrances, etc.). As he demonstrates, one of the responses to this institutional innovation was to abandon a traditional form of Egyptian mortgage for a more efficient one.[104] In other words, new institutions and cheaper information led to new preferences and unintended consequences. Similarly, there is no reason to expect the totality of Roman power to have produced but one effect through one path of causation when it comes to mantic innovation: Roman fiscal, administrative, and political policies acted simultaneously on temples and clients, reshaping both how the gods were consulted and what they were asked. Interpreting ancient divination, therefore, depends no less on understanding what happened to the sources and focalizations of uncertainty than in appreciating the force of custom or structures of belief, particularly as clients were more likely to be interested in an oracle's capacity to solve their problems than its source of inspiration or theory of communication, philosophical questions that were largely left to philosophers and priests, like Plutarch, to argue.

For these reasons this chapter privileged the questions people asked and the answers they received, using texts like the ticket oracles and the Sortes

103 Frankfurter, *Religion in Roman Egypt*, 178.

104 François Lerouxel, "The βιβλιοθήκη ἐγκτήσεων and Transaction Costs in the Credit Market of Roman Egypt (30 B.C.E. to ca. 170 C.E.)," in Kehoe et al., *Law and Transaction Costs in the Ancient Economy*, 162–84.

Astrampsychi as lenses focused on the problems they had in part evolved to solve – seeing oracles, in other words, as tools in a larger practice or algorithm of problem solving. Put another way, the contention is that we consider divination more concretely in the context of overall information demand, in order to study oracles as a form of 'information technology.'[105] It stands to reason that as the Romans made economic and legal information more available (or cheaper), oracle questions would become more specific in those arenas, being articulated at the end of a longer line of research. It also stands to reason that new loci of uncertainty would appear, above all the government itself, not only as a source of social and economic power, but also as the font or keeper of much of this new information. I believe this is exactly what we observe: ticket oracles like P.Oxy. LV 3799 and SB XII 11227 (see above) respond to uncertainties generated by the Roman system and stand in a direct and continuous relation to documents like P.Oxy. XIV 1654, another artifact of the Roman information architecture. The striking confidence and clarity of SA[1] reveals the same forces at work in a different oracular technology.

Finally, with respect the Sortes Astrampsychi, it is my hope that the preceding analysis has succeeded in making this oracular text something more than a curiosity of ancient religious or popular literature. It was, as Randall Stewart reminds us, a popular text, at least to judge from the relative frequency of the papyrological remains.[106] It therefore deserves a correspondingly prominent role in our account of how people made economic decisions in antiquity. First, I believe that we may, on the basis of some plausible assumptions, infer something about the relative level of economic confidence in antiquity from the distribution of responses. Second, there is a case to be made that SA[1] and other lot oracles were economically efficient, insofar as they helped communicate and share consumer confidence and translate it into a higher rate of marginal transactions. It would seem fair to say that recent scholarship on ancient divination, which is intent on taking the Sortes Astrampsychi seriously, has been willing to see it performing important social or psychological functions, but without having any "true effect on the course of events."[107] My suggestion, however, is that at least some sub-élite, commercial lot oracles had not only real effects on economic outcomes, but beneficial ones, not by virtue of their specific truth content (since they had none) but

105 E.g., Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 212; Frankfurter "Voices, Books, and Dreams," 238.

106 See Stewart's contribution in this volume.

107 Dieleman, "Coping with a Difficult Life," 338; cf. Tallet, "Oracles," 399–400; Lane Fox, *Pagans and Christians*, 211. See Frankfurter, "Voices, Books, and Dreams," 233–34 on the sea change in the scholarship on divination.

by providing a path through uncertainty in specific cases by gathering and reflecting distributed information about markets.[108] One may thus think of the oracle-seller as sitting at the center of a feedback loop, measuring and averaging client response to particular questions, such that the "truth" he sold was generally correct, but specifically random. Finally, few historians would disagree with the conclusion that the Roman imperial period represented a high point in economic confidence and institutional development when compared to the Byzantine period (or whatever period one wishes to assign to SA^2).[109] The texts of the Sortes Astrampsychi are, however, one of relatively few non-archaeological indices we have to support that view, and perhaps the only one that might be seen as directly measuring confidence.[110]

Oracles thus have something to teach us about microeconomic behavior and macroeconomic development in the ancient world. They were institutions that helped make the Roman period a more slightly prosperous one by increasing the number of marginal transactions, an information technology that 'blossomed' in part as a response to the more robust and richer institutional setting which the Romans imposed and encouraged. These oracles stood in some sort of dynamic equilibrium with the institutional landscape of the high Roman Empire, and so there were limits to their efficiency as decision-making devices: the narrower and more specific the questions became – the more, in other words, oracles were used to solicit specific pieces of information – the

108 Cf. Zeitlyn, "Divinatory Logics," 537. Hélène Cuvigny has recently offered a strong biochemical interpretation of oracular efficacy: "The Shrine in the praesidium of Dios (Eastern Desert of Egypt): Graffiti and Oracles in Context," *Chiron* 40 (2010): 268–69. See Omar K. Moore, "Divination – A new perspective," *American Anthropologist* 59 (1957): 69–74 for the classic account of the efficient randomization function of certain forms of divination.

109 It is true that both sets of responses, SA^1 and SA^2, survived to be copied in the medieval period, but it would seem significant that the shorter responses of SA^1 survive in only one manuscript (Ambrosianus A 45 sup.), whereas the responses which characterize SA^2 developed sometime after the sixth century (which is as late as our papyrological witnesses currently extend) were evidently copied far more frequently (eleven manuscripts).

110 On archaeological indices, see Walter Scheidel, "In Search of Roman Economic Growth," *JRA* 46 (2009): 46–70; Andrew Wilson, "Indicators for Roman Economic Growth: A Response to Walter Scheidel." *JRA* 46 (2009): 71–82; and the various essays in Alan Bowman and Andrew Wilson, eds., *Quantifying the Roman Economy: Methods and Problems* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); and more recently, Peter Temin, *The Roman Market Economy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), chs. 9 and 10, and the important paper by Andrew Wilson, "Quantifying Roman economic performance by means of proxies: pitfalls and potential," in *Quantifying the Greco-Roman Economy and Beyond*, ed. F. de Callataÿ (Bari: Edipuglia, 2014), 147–67. On other textual indices from Egypt (e.g., tracking prices, crop yields, etc.), see Alan Bowman, "Quantifying Egyptian Agriculture," in Bowman and Wilson, *Quantifying the Roman Economy*, 177–204.

more liable they were to cross-checking and falsification. For what was a client to think when he is told that he will win a certain contract with a higher bid only to find himself outbid by a competitor (P.Oxy. LV 3799)? In a different study, I suggest that the Roman subjects of Egypt in fact 'broke' their oracles, pushing them beyond their effective capacity, and that it is this which lies behind the infamous Severan "ban" of divination found in P.Coll.Youtie I 30. But that does not detract in any way from the fact that Plutarch was right: the questions put to the oracle were truly signs of the Roman times, and the Roman times were pretty good.

CHAPTER 13

"I Do Not Wish to Be Rich": the 'Barbarian' Christian Tatian Responds to *Sortes*

Laura Salah Nasrallah[1]

> Your craft is to conjure a social system from a nutmeg grater.
> CAROLYN STEEDMAN[2]

⁂

Writings of the first few centuries of the common era could form a word cloud with various terms oversize or in boldface type: *moira, heimarmenē, fatum, anankē, necessitas, fortuna, tychē, pronoia, providentia*.[3] E. R. Dodds famously characterized the second century and following as an 'age of anxiety.' He did so not only because of plagues, famines, invasions, and the like, but also because of what he saw as a sea-change in religion towards the sort of inward turn of individuated religious experience and a desire for personal salvation described by William James.[4]

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2 Carolyn Steedman, *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2002), 18.

3 On overlapping terminology and this topic more broadly, see Nasrallah, "Lot Oracles and Fate."

4 E. R. Dodds, *Pagans and Christians in an Age of Anxiety: Some Aspects of Religious Experience from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1965), 2. See also his autobiography, *Missing Persons: An Autobiography* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977). For similar thought at this time, see André Jean Festugière, *La révélation d'Hermès Trismégiste*, 4 vols. (Paris: J. Gabalda, 1944–1954); see also the immediate response to Dodds's work: e.g.,

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The second-century Lucian, satirist and theologian, seems to support Dodds's idea of an age of anxiety. His satirical writings contain much compelling theological thought. He jokes that even the gods are anxious about fate: humans have ceased to sacrifice because they have rightly perceived that the gods, too, are subject to fate and thus nearly as powerless as humans. Lucian invents a dialogue in which a character named Kyniskos says to Zeus,

> I see now that in reality you yourself with your cord and your threats hang by a slender thread.... If ... the Fates (Μοῖραι) rule everything, and nobody can ever change anything that they have once decreed, why do we people sacrifice to you gods? ... I really don't see what benefit we can derive from the precaution.
>
> *Jupp. conf.* 4–5[5]

In antiquity, people are anxious. Even the gods are anxious.

Both Dodds in his 1963 Wiles lectures and Peter Brown in his 1976 lectures mentioned *sortes* as a key for writing a religious history of late antiquity. Dodds had used a papyrus of the Sortes Astrampsychi to conclude:

> No doubt much of the increasing demand for oracles simply reflects the increasing insecurity of the times. This is illustrated by a papyrus containing a list of 21 inquiries addressed to some oracle late in the third century: they include such questions as, 'Am I to become a beggar?', 'Shall I be sold up?', 'Should I take to flight?', 'Shall I get my salary?', 'Am I under a spell?' Sometime in the second or the third century one Theophilus put a less personal problem to the oracle of Claros: 'Are you a God,' he asked, 'or is someone else God?'[6]

Peter Brown, mentioning one of the papyri we now know as the Sortes Astrampsychi,[7] wrote:

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negatively, by A. C. Lloyd, review, *JRS* 56 (1966): 253–54, more appreciatively by Zeph Stewart, review, *JTS* 17 (1966): 160–67. For William James, see *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (New York: The Modern Library, 1902), esp. 213–53 (Lecture X).

5 Lucian, vol. 2, trans. A. M. Harmon, LCL 54 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1915), 65, 67.

6 Dodds, *Pagans and Christian*, 57.

7 Randall Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. 2: *Ecdosis altera* (Leipzig: Saur, 2001), viii–xi on manuscripts and esp. viii–ix on five Oxyrhynchus fragments, including P.Oxy. 1477; Stewart, "The Textual Transmission of the Sortes Astrampsychi," *Illinois Classical Studies* 20 (1995): 139.

> A series of questions posed to an oracle in Oxyrhynchus has been made famous by Rostovtzeff as evidence for the deepening insecurity of the time:
>
> > Shall I be sold up?
> > Am I to become a beggar?
> > Shall I take to flight?
>
> But the troubles of an Egyptian townsman did not end there:
>
> > Shall I obtain benefit from my friend?
> > Shall I be reconciled with my wife?
> > Shall I get a divorce?
> > Have I been bewitched?
>
> These, the *grandeur et misère* of life in a small community, are the humus from which profound religious and cultural changes spring. The religious historian, just because he is a religious historian, must be 'concrete and fastidious.' He needs a sense of life lived twenty-four hours in the day.[8]

In his 1976 lectures that were the basis of *The Making of Late Antiquity*, Brown pointed to the *sortes* as shedding light on everyday life. He rightly critiqued Franz Cumont, André Festugière, E. R. Dodds, and others for their sweeping statements about crisis and their notions of sweaty religious panics in antiquity. We can say that such characterizations arose more from twentieth-century Western concerns about the individual, salvation, and psychology – not to mention Auden's poem titled 'The Age of Anxiety' and its interest in psychology and rootedness in mourning the Second World War – than second- and third-century Mediterranean concerns about divine involvement in human affairs.[9] Such scholarly characterizations of an ancient age of anxiety did not take into account the rhetoric and *topoi* of suffering and anxiety in the second century, as Judith Perkins has discussed.[10] We could, moreover, question Dodds's

8 Peter Brown, *Making of Late Antiquity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 6. At 'bewitched,' Brown cites P.Oxy. 1477; Michael Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Roman Empire* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1926), 437; A. Henrichs, "Zwei Orakelfragen," *ZPE* 11 (1973): 117.

9 Nicola Denzey, "'Enslavement to Fate', 'Cosmic Pessimism' and other explorations of the late Roman psyche: A brief history of a historiographical trend," *SR* 33 (2004): 277–99.

10 Judith Perkins, *The Suffering Self: Pain and Narrative Representation in the Early Christian Era* (London: Routledge, 1995); Denzey, "Enslavement to Fate," esp. 280.

determination that an age of anxiety stretched from Marcus Aurelius to Constantine merely by asking: by what criteria do we determine that this time period was more soaked in anxiety and concerns about fate than some earlier time period? We know of discussions of fate not only in the high Roman Empire but also in Plato's *Laws* or in his account of the creation of the cosmos in the *Timaeus*, or in fragments of Hellenistic Stoic thinkers, or Chrysippus's lost *On Providence* or what we have of Cicero's *On Fate*.[11] These more ancient texts become key for Roman-period debates about the relative merits and demerits of the Stoic emphasis on Fate, on the one hand, and (often) a kind of personal god who takes interest in the small stuff of human life, on the other.

Dodd's 'age of anxiety' was long preceded by debates over providence, the origins of the world and its subsequent ordering through divine oversight, and the means by which elite and poor alike assess whether they have free will in such a system, access knowledge of their life trajectories, and determine how concerned the gods are with their lives. Such debates continue to our own day.[12] What we see in first- and second-century philosophical-theological debates about fate and free will, as well as practices of sortition, prayer, sacrifice, and the like, is not a new age of anxiety, but rather a particular articulation of a longstanding debate about how the cosmos works, whether the divine is concerned about the cosmos in general and humans in particular, and the limits of human freedom.

The phenomenon of *sortes*, of lot oracles, is one set of evidence within our larger materials about fate and possibly anxiety in late antiquity. The *sortes* are useful 'to think with' in evaluating the historiography of an age of anxiety; they are also a touchstone for assessing larger philosophical and theological issues of the high Roman Empire. My chapter brings together this idea of an age of anxiety with the phenomenon of *sortes*, critically assessing this theme of an age of anxiety starting from a small observation. I try "to conjure a social system" – and a theological-philosophical world – "from a nutmeg grater," to borrow Carolyn Steedman's words. My nutmeg grater is a short, puzzling passage in the second-century 'barbarian' Christian Tatian's *Oration to the Greeks* (*Oratio ad Graecos*). I will argue that this short passage may be best understood as an allusion to and rejection of the practice of *sortes*, and specifically a lot oracle like those we see in the manuscripts of the Sortes

11 Dorothea Frede, "Theodicy and Providential Care in Stoicism," in *Traditions of Theology: Studies in Hellenistic Theology, Its Background and Aftermath*, ed. Dorothea Frede and André Laks (Leiden: Brill, 2002), 85–117.

12 For a critical assessment of the historiography, see Nicola Denzey, "Enslavement to Fate"; Esther Eidinow, *Luck, Fate, and Fortune* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

Astrampsychi. This is a small contribution to a tiny corner of the scholarly world, since even most scholars of early Christianity do not like and therefore ignore Tatian.

Thus I hope to make a second, slightly larger contribution: to argue that Tatian's short allusion to *sortes*-questions and his philosophical-theological rejection of such questions opens up a world of debate, bringing us back to Dodds's and others' use of the *sortes* as evidence for an 'age of anxiety.' Tatian's opposition to *sortes* will form a case study from which we can speculate that *sortes* sometimes served as an archive that spurred particular constructions of the self.

1 Early Christian Apologists and *Sortes*

What exactly is sortition? Pieter van der Horst succinctly defines cleromancy as "prognostication, or rather problem-solving, by means of the drawing of lots [*sortilegium*] or the casting of dice [astragalomancy] or other randomizing practices."[13] The Sortes Astrampsychi is a particularly good example of the phenomenon, since it is found in multiple manuscripts and languages extending from the third to the sixteenth centuries, a temporal and linguistic breadth that indicates its popularity.[14] It consisted of three sections. The first was a set of questions that a petitioner might choose to have answered by the process of sortition. The questions which one would choose before the roll of the dice are simple and practical, but also powerful and poignant: Will I sail safely? (1) Will I serve in the army (14)? Will I rear the baby? (30) Will I be freed from slavery? (32) Will I find the fugitive? (36) Will I find what I have lost? (40) Will I survive the sickness? (46).[15] The second section of the Sortes Astrampsychi contained a table of correspondences (i.e., a table which allowed you to convert the number of your question to a number where one would find an answer), and the third, the decades (i.e., sets of ten) of answers themselves. The origins of the Sortes Astrampsychi may lie in the first century CE;[16] it

13 Pieter van der Horst, "*Sortes*: Sacred Books as Instant Oracles in Late Antiquity," in *The Use of Sacred Books in the Ancient World*, ed. Leonard Rutgers et al. (Leuven: Peeters, 1998), 143–44.

14 Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. 2; Stewart, "Textual Transmission," 135–47; Randall Stewart and Kenneth Morrell, "The Oracles of Astrampsychus," in *Anthology of Popular Greek Literature*, ed. William Hansen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 290.

15 Stewart and Morrell, "The Oracles of Astrampsychus."

16 Stewart, "Textual Transmission."

was very popular in the second and third centuries CE,[17] and its popularity continued for centuries as it found its way into different languages and was edited according to the religious and cultural sensibilities of those languages, regions, and times.[18]

According to the Acts of the Apostles, an apostle was chosen by lot in order to replace the betrayer Judas Iscariot (Acts 1:26).[19] Yet even if a late first- or early second-century source admits to Christian cleromancy, you would think that many second-century Christian apologetic texts would condemn cleromancy along with other practices as an example of Greek or non-Christian depravity and evil; elsewhere, we find mockery of astrological practices (e.g., Tatian's *Oratio ad Graecos*) and oracular phenomena such as the Pythia at Delphi (e.g., Origen *Cels.* 7.3).[20] We might then think that early Christian apologists would also make fun of those frantically consulting books of *sortes*, or holding onto the bones of dead animals – *astragaloi* – in order to cast their own sad fates. Even the great Hadrianic era scientist and prognosticator Artemidorus says that dreaming of dice is generally bad: dice are made from the bones of the dead, and thus usually portend death (*On.* 3.1–9).

We know that at a later period Christians would come to condemn pagan *and* Christian *sortes*. Yet, clearly, at the same time, some Christians used *sortes* and others adapted so-called pagan *sortes* for themselves, whether the Sortes Sangallenses or Sortes Sanctorum studied by William Klingshirn[21] or the

17 Stewart and Morrell, "The Oracles of Astrampsychus."

18 William Hansen, "Introduction," *Anthology of Popular Greek Literature*, xi–xxix.

19 καὶ ἔδωκαν κλήρους αὐτοῖς, καὶ ἔπεσεν ὁ κλῆρος ἐπὶ Μαθθίαν καὶ συγκατεψηφίσθη μετὰ τῶν ἕνδεκα ἀποστόλων.

20 Origen, *Contra Celsum*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1980), 396–97: "Let us suppose that the prophecies of the Pythian priestess and the other oracles are not inventions of men who pretend to possess divine inspiration.... it is more likely that they are caused by certain evil daemons and spirits hostile to the human race, who hinder the soul's ascent and journey by means of virtue, and a restoration of true piety towards God. Indeed, of the Pythian priestess – the oracle that seems to be more distinguished than the others – it is related that while the prophetess of Apollo is sitting at the mouth of the Castalian cave she receives a spirit through her womb; after being filled with this she utters oracular sayings, supposed to be sacred and divine. Consider, then, whether this does not indicate the impure and foul nature of that spirit in that it enters the soul of the prophetess, not by open and invisible pores which are far purer than the womb, but through the latter part which it would be wrong for a self-controlled and sensible man to look upon or, I might add, even to touch."

21 William E. Klingshirn, "Defining the Sortes Sanctorum: Gibbon, Du Cange, and Early Christian Lot Divination," *JECS* 10 (2002): 77–130; Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul: the Sortes Sangallenses," in *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, ed. Sarah Iles Johnston and Peter T. Struck (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 99–128.

palm-sized Coptic codex of the Gospel of the Lots of Mary discussed in this volume by AnneMarie Luijendijk, the lot oracles at the shrine of St. Colluthus that David Frankfurter has analyzed,[22] or the manuscript variants of the Sortes Astrampsychi discussed by Randall Stewart and Franziska Naether.[23] We also know that by the sixth-century canon of Vannes, Christian authorities were officially disapproving of divination; to be more specific, they were condemning clergy in their midst who were engaged in divination.[24]

Yet second-century Christian apologists largely do not mention cleromancy, even if they wrote treatises struggling against others' cosmologies and notions of fate – theological questions that are the underpinnings of the theological practice of lot oracles.[25] Among key Christian apologetic texts in Greek – Luke-Acts, Athenagoras, Justin, and Clement of Alexandria – a search of the root of κύβος, cube or dice (κυβ-), turns up nothing related to dice oracles.[26] So too a search for the root of ἀστράγαλος (αστραγαλ-) reveals nothing substantial among early Christian apologists writing in Greek in the second century. While we can find various second-century Christian apologists touching upon the theme of fate, it is only Tatian who connects dice-playing and the element of chance celebrated in such play with a critique of cleromancy.

22 Lucia Papini, "Fragments of the *Sortes Sanctorum* from the Shrine of St. Colluthus," in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, ed. David Frankfurter (Leiden: Brill, 1998), 393–401; see also Frankfurter, "Voices, Books, and Dreams: The Diversification of Divination Media in Late Antique Egypt," in Johnston and Struck, *Mantikē*, 233–54.

23 Stewart, "Textual Transmission"; Franziska Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi: Problemlösungsstrategien durch Orakel im römischen Ägypten* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010).

24 Thus perhaps their disapproval was not only theological but also simultaneously ethical and economic: they might have been disapproving the very acts of cleromancy that they knew were going on around them through the opening of the Bible itself or through the Sortes Sanctorum, as Klingshirn has discussed in "Defining the Sortes Sanctorum." They might too have been wondering why should those fellows get the extra work, and perhaps the extra donations.

25 E.g., Pseudo-Athenagoras *Res*. 18; Theophilus, *Autol.* 2.8; Origen *Princ*. 3.1 esp. at 3.1.13; see also Silke-Petra Bergjan, *Der fürsorgende Gott: der Begriff der* PRONOIA *Gottes in der apologetischen Literatur der Alten* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002); Theodor Ebert, "Theodicy," *Brill's New Pauly* 14 (2009), 447; Fritz Graf and Volker Henning Drecoll, "Predestination, theory of," *Brill's New Pauly* 11 (2007), 795–796.

26 Clement of Alexandria criticizes specifically dice-playing (*Paed.* 3.11); by the third century see Origen, *Cels.* 6.11, aimed against Celsus's accusation that some resort to dice to figure out whom they should follow as the Christ.

2 Tatian

Not much of Tatian's work remains, and what little we know about him is largely gleaned from his opponents. He is probably most famous for his *Diatessaron*, a harmony of the four gospels extant in Syriac. What remains of his writing in its original Greek is the *Oration to the Greeks* and a few fragments.[27] He claims to be a student of the soberer and more respected Justin Martyr, and thus writes in the late second century. He mentions going to the city of the Romans (presumably Rome itself), but it is likely that at least some of his activity occurred in Asia Minor, where Justin was active for a time.

Tatian presents his main argument at the very beginning of *To the Greeks*: Greek customs (ἐπιτήδευμα) are themselves hybridized from multiple 'barbarian' cultures and parasitic upon them.

> Do not maintain a totally hostile attitude toward barbarians, Greeks (ὦ ἄνδρες Ἕλληνες), nor resent their teachings, for which of your own practices did not have a barbarian origin? The most famous of the Telmessians invented divination through dreams, Carians foreknowledge through the stars, the most ancient Phrygians and Isaurians the flights of birds, Kyprians divination through sacrifice, the Babylonians astronomy, Persians magic, Egyptians geometry, Phoenicians *paideia* through letters.
>
> *Or. Graec.* 1.1[28]

The power and dominance of Greek *paideia* rest upon a false foundation: the Greeks remixed from the start, and then claimed the knowledge was theirs. Moreover, the very first examples of the derivativeness of so-called Greek customs have to do with divination. Greeks have incorporated into themselves 'foreign' practices of divination, which take a range of forms. Tatian has prognostication on his mind.

Tatian takes a different course from other Christian writers of his time, including his own teacher Justin. They crafted themselves as participants in Greek *paideia* and even as the best of Greek *paideia*; taking up the mantle of

27 Easily accessible in Molly Whittaker, ed. and trans., *Tatian: Oratio ad Graecos and Fragments* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982). For basic info on Tatian see Laura Nasrallah, "What is the Space of the Roman Empire? Mapping, Bodies, and Knowledge in the Roman World," chap. 2 in *Christian Responses to Roman Art and Architecture: The Second-Century Church amid the Spaces of Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

28 All translations of Tatian are mine, sometimes aided by those of Molly Whittaker; Greek edition used is Miroslav Marcovich, ed., *Tatiani Oratio ad Graecos; Theophili Antiocheni Ad Autolycum* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1995).

Socrates, these early Christians claimed that they reformed Greekness with the true rationality of Christianity. Tatian's first words passionately present the writer as a barbarian who insults Greeks, a harbinger of some 'third race' that he never names Christian. He concludes his work:

> I have set these things in order for you, Greeks – I, Tatian, a philosopher in the region of the barbarians, born in the land of the Assyrians, but educated (παιδευθείς) first in your learning and second in what I now announce that I preach.
>
> *Or. Graec.* 42.1[29]

Yet *To the Greeks* is written in Greek and is deeply rooted in traditions of Greek *paideia*, an irony that Tatian himself appreciated, and in a knowledge, however polemically presented, of the religious traditions of multiple nations. Among this satirical catalogue of other nations' ridiculous theological practices,[30] *To the Greeks* includes a passage on issues that have to do with the future – astrology or, perhaps, oracles. Within this, a curious subsection governed by the first-person singular should be understood as Tatian's (near?) quotation of sortition texts, whether that oracle be in book form as the Sortes Astrampsychi, or dice oracles connected with inscriptions.

In the larger passage, Tatian addresses the question of why he should worship gods who take bribes and are angry if they do not get them – that is, he has been mocking the shortfalls of Greek gods. He then touches upon astrology and those divinities who manage human fates: "How, then, can I accept [the concept of] a fate-ordained birth, seeing that its managers (οἰκονόμους) are of this sort?" (*Or. Graec.* 11.1) He then immediately rushes into a catalogue:

> I have no desire to rule.
> I do not wish to be rich.
> I do not beg after a generalship.

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29 For bibliography, see Nasrallah, "What Do We Learn When We Look? (Part I) Images, Desires, and Tatian's *To the Greeks*," chap. 6 in *Christian Responses*. Tatian has frequently been read primarily in terms of his harsh polemics and heresy. See R. M. Grant, "The Heresy of Tatian," *JTS* 5 (1954): 62–68; Gerald Hawthorne, "Tatian and His Discourse to the Greek," *HTR* 57 3 (1964) 161–88; and even Whittaker, *Tatian*. Yet, Emily J. Hunt, *Christianity in the Second Century: The Case of Tatian* (London: Routledge, 2003) and Naomi Koltun-Fromm, "Re-imagining Tatian: The Damaging Effects of Polemical Rhetoric," *JECS* 16 (2008): 1–30 are exceptions, esp. the latter, offering new understandings that take Tatian himself more seriously and view his treatment by heresiologists within intra-Christian debates.

30 Nasrallah, *Christian Responses*, esp. 240–46.

> I have hated fornication.
> I do not pursue voyages because of my greediness.
> I am not in competition to have athletes' crowns; I am set free from a mania for glory.
> I scorn death.
> I rise above every form of sickness.
> Grief does not consume my soul.
> If I be a slave, I remain in slavery,
> And if I am free, I am not proud of my noble birth [see 1 Cor 7:20–24].
>
> *Or. Graec.* 11.1–2

The passage comes within a section in which Tatian, like his teacher Justin, blames a significant amount of religious and cultural depravity on *daimones* and the apparitions that they create (*Or. Graec.* 7.5: τὰ φαντάσματα δαιμόνων).[31] *Daimones* work actively in the world to lead people astray, and bad Greek theology and astrology are part and parcel of their tempting deceptions. Tatian explains:

> Humans became subject to their [the *daimones*'] revolt [against God]. Just like those who play at dice (οἱ τοῖς κύβοις παίζοντες), [the *daimones*] introduced fate – very unjustly – by showing diagrams of the constellations to humans. Both the judge and s/he who is judged have become subject to *Heimarmenē*, and murderers and the murdered and the wealthy and the poor are offspring of the very same fate (εἱμαρμένη), and every birth has supplied, as in a theater, a rare sport for them, among whom, as Homer says, "aroused unquenchable laughter among the most blessed divinities."
>
> *Or. Graec.* 8.1

Tatian brings together fate, playing at dice, and the tricks of the *daimones*. He argues that his barbarian community escapes the depravities of the gods, the tenuous links between fate on earth and the mapping of the stars (*Or. Graec.* 9), and the ridiculousness and capriciousness of those who determine or state

31 On this philosophical/epistemological problem, see e.g., Epictetus *Diatr.* 2.7; Origen *Princ.* 3.1; the role of the true philosopher or the person properly trained is to know how to judge properly the *phantasmata* and to perceive correctly and then practice/behave accordingly. Since *phantasma* is another term for *phantasia*, Tatian may be pointing to epistemic issues: the *daimones* presumably lead humans to bad epistemic choices, to assent to false appearances.

such *heimarmenē*. Punning on the 'planets' (*planē* in Greek also means 'error') and determining one's fate through astrology, he writes:

> ἡμεῖς δὲ καὶ εἱμαρμένης ἐσμὲν ἀνώτεροι καὶ ἀντὶ πλανητῶν δαιμόνων ἕνα τὸν ἀπλανῆ δεσπότην μεμαθήκαμεν καὶ οὐ καθ' εἱμαρμένην ἀγόμενοι τοὺς ταύτης νομοθέτας παρῃτήμεθα.
>
> *Or. Graec.* 9.3

> But we are above fate and instead of the erring *daimones* we have known the one un-erring lord; and, since we are not led by fate, we decline her lawgivers.

Tatian jokingly insists that the least the hearers can do is to take his insights regarding the nature of the cosmos as seriously as they do the prognostication of the Babylonians, or the quivering leaves of the mantic oak – that is, the oracle of Zeus at Dodona (*Or. Graec.* 12.5–7).

3 Tatian and *Sortes*

It should be obvious by now that Tatian is familiar with prognostications, divinations, and oracular practices at his time. The passage under discussion improvises on themes that the *sortes* treat and indicates that Tatian is directly responding to *sortes* – not to the Sortes Astrampsychi necessarily, but to the way in which such texts philosophically and theologically form the self.

There are four indications that Tatian's odd passage that begins "I have no desire to be rich" may have been penned as a response to the phenomenon of *sortes* such as the Sortes Astrampsychi. First, as we have seen, Tatian's *To the Greeks* begins with mention of divinatory practices that the Greeks stole from various other nations. From the start, Tatian is thinking about divination, and given the widespread and multiform nature of *sortes* in antiquity, it is reasonable that his critique may have included sortition oracles or manuals. Second, the passage "I do not want to rule" falls within a section of *To the Greeks* in which he links together demonic activity, playing at dice, and *heimarmenē*, or fate, likely alluding to dice oracles.

Third, Tatian was probably active in Asia Minor, where Justin seems to have taught for a time. Asia Minor is the site of three famous oracles of Apollo, at Klaros, Didyma, and Hierapolis, the latter an alphabetic oracle.[32] Even more

32 Sarah Iles Johnston, *Ancient Greek Divination* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2008).

importantly, lot oracles were common in the market places of southwestern cities in Asia Minor.[33] At these sites, large stelae were erected and often topped with a statue of Hermes/Mercury. A well-preserved example from Kremna in Pisidia, which was situated beside the basilica and "which certainly served as the meeting place for the colony's governing *ordo* and its magistrates," indicates the centrality of this dice oracle to the city, according to excavator Stephen Mitchell.[34] As with other similar inscriptions throughout Asia Minor, the four sides of the stele contain inscriptions detailing the roll of the dice, (often) the name of the god or *daimon* with which the roll was associated, and the 'result' or divination.[35] While the inscriptions vary in content and, of course, in dedicatory inscriptions, they also have remarkably similar themes. People – probably of some means – are worried about buying and selling, about travel and lawsuits; their throws of *astragaloi* – five throws of four-sided *astragaloi* in the case of Kremna and other similar oracles – lead to such oracles as these: "Now a Daimon accomplishes everything for you and sets you on the right road …," according to an oracle of Nemesis located on side B of the stele; or "Do not hurry this, either to buy or to sell," according to an oracle of the Delphic Apollo, located on the same side. We even find an oracle that gives a response with lactation as a metaphor: "This woman giving birth to a new baby has dry breasts; but she has flourished again and is flowing with milk. Then also you shall have the fruits for which you ask me."[36] Given the vagaries of such activities as shipping and harvest, the desire to glean more business information – in Eidinow's terms, to manage risk by means of oracles – was understandable.[37]

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33 Johannes Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel: Astragal – und Alphabetchresmologien der hochkaiserzeitlichen Orakelrenaissance* (München: Beck, 2007); see also discussion in Nasrallah, "Lot Oracles and Fate."

34 Stephen Mitchell et al., *Cremna in Pisidia: An Ancient City in Peace and in War* (London: Duckworth, 1995), 67. For a transcription of the inscription, which begins with a Latin dedication and then breaks into Greek, see G. H. R. Horsley and Stephen Mitchell, eds., *The Inscriptions of Central Pisidia: Including Texts from Kremna, Ariassos, Keraia, Hyia, Panemoteichos, the Sanctuary of Apollo of the Perminoundeis, Sia, Kocaaliler, and the Döşeme Boğazı* (Bonn: R. Habelt, 2000), 22–38; it includes a translation and description. For the most complete set of transcriptions, German translations, and explanations of lot oracles, see Johannes Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*; at pp. 123 ff. see his attempt to reconstruct an *Urtext* for southern Asia Minor astragal oracles that involve five throws; on Kremna see pp. 68–77.

35 Mitchell et al., *Cremna in Pisidia*, 66–67.

36 Horsley and Mitchell, *Inscriptions of Central Pisidia*, 26–29 (B XXVIII of Nemesis); "Do not hurry this, either to buy or to sell" (B XXIV of Delphic Apollo); B XIX of Tyche the Savior.

37 On oracles as a strategy for gaining information in an uncertain market, see David Ratzan in this volume; on market vagaries, see e.g. Peter Garnsey, *Famine and Food Supply in the*

Fourth, an investigation of the vocabulary of the Sortes Astrampsychi against the short passage from Tatian cited above (*Or. Graec.* 11)[38] reveals some significant overlaps. These support my idea that Tatian may be improvising on *sortes* in his catalogue of things that he does and does not want and do. The first phrase, "I have no desire to rule," turns up no concrete parallel for βασιλεύειν in the *sortes* literature. But references to wealth, which appears in Tatian's second phrase, appear four times in the Sortes Astrampsychi; references to the office of general or a position of command appear once in Tatian and eleven times in the Sortes Astrampsychi; one reference to fornication (πορνεία) in Tatian is matched by one; Tatian's concern about ἀγών or athletic competition finds twenty references in the *sortes*. Tatian states, "I scorn death," and death is mentioned eighteen times in Stewart's; references to slavery and freedom are found four times in Tatian and eleven times in the Sortes Astrampsychi, using searches for the roots δουλ- and ελευθερ-. Elsewhere, we find conceptual overlaps even if there is no precise philological match, for instance in references to sailing (*Or. Graec.* 11.2). By investigating such philological parallels I do not mean to imply that Tatian had a copy of the Sortes Astrampsychi in front of him as he wrote, nor do I imply that the Sortes Astrampsychi were static: we know that their questions and answers shifted in manuscripts and were later transformed for Christian uses. Instead, I argue that Tatian's odd interruption of a larger discussion of astrology, dice-casting, and daimonic activity with the passage "I have no desire to rule. I do not want to be rich …" cites and rejects the larger phenomenon of *sortes*.

4 Tatian and an Age of Anxiety

There are substantial overlaps between the kinds of anxieties that lie behind Tatian's rejection of certain questions and the sorts of questions that one would bring to a ritual expert who helped with the Sortes Astrampsychi, or the

Graeco-Roman World: Responses to Risk and Crisis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988). Johannes Nollé wonders whether the dice oracles of the second century may have been erected in part because traditional religions needed to rally against Christian newcomers (*Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 207, 288–93).

38 Sortes Astrampsychi: Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. 2; Tatian: Edgar J. Goodspeed, *Die ältesten Apologeten: Texte mit kurzen Einleitungen* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht: 1914). I am grateful to research assistant Daniel Becerra for his work on philological overlaps.

sorts of questions one would have in mind as one cast the *astragaloi* at a dice oracle like those in southwest Asia Minor.[39]

Sortes, whether in the form of manuscripts of the Sortes Astrampsychi or the lot oracles of Asia Minor, are a response to a particular philosophical or theological problem: How does one respond to the vagaries of life? With Stoic philosophy and theology? With Christian prayer? With acts of sacrifice? With a 'magical' text? The *sortes*, alongside other philosophical and theological speculations and practices, are a sort of archive that constructs a self: a self that is simultaneously empowered to consult the oracle, but anxious enough to have the need to do so in the first place; how else can we explain the concerns over poisoning – over poisoning, business deals, sexual relations, children, death, freedom? The very act of consulting the *sortes* indicates that one is *doing something* about this situation.

Such oracles do not indicate fatalistic determinism or some sense that no free will can exist in the face of the grinding powers of *Heimarmenē*. Rather, they indicate an incremental, perhaps regular attempt on the part of individuals, within their communities, to chart a course in their lives given the data that they are empowered to glean with the help of God, the gods, or *daimones*. We can wonder what it means to sort through questions about adultery, inheritance, reproductive success, advancement in office, presumably with a ritual expert, and to select and to declare one of *these* as best describing you at the moment.

Tatian participates in philosophical constructions of a self that is not buffeted by fear of externals – including exile, blindness, business failures, loss of status, as we find mentioned in Epictetus's *Diatribes*, to give only one example. Epictetus (as recorded by Arrian) jokes about human propensities:

> Wherefore, being tied fast to many things, we are burdened and dragged down by them. That is why, if the weather keeps us from sailing, we sit down and fidget and keep constantly peering about. 'What wind is blowing?' we ask. Boreas. 'What have we to do with it? When will Zephyrus blow?' When it pleases, good sir.… we must make the best of what is under our control, and take the rest as its nature is. 'How, then, is its nature?' As

39 I use the word fear because as AnneMarie Luijendijk has shown (*Forbidden Oracles? The Gospel of the Lots of Mary* [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014], esp. 76–78), many of these *sortes* contain explicit injunctions directing the emotional state of the suppliant: Don't doubt. Don't fear. Of course, such exhortations indicate precisely that there *is* doubt and fear.

> God wills. 'Must I, then, be the only one to be beheaded now?' Why, did you want everyone to be beheaded for your consolation?
>
> *Diatr*. 1.1.16–18[40]

Epictetus demands that his students respond in two ways to the constant vagaries of the external events and impressions that meet them, whether these have to do with the wind, sailing, and business matters, or with death and political oppression. First, the students should truly apprehend the externals and realize that, on their path of philosophy, they can do nothing but to form their subjectivity so as to be inured to externals, whether they come in the form of poverty, enslavement, tyranny, loss of status, or whether they come in the form of *phantasiai*, impressions gleaned through sense perception that can mislead unless they are met by proper (rational) apperception or judgment (*dogmata, doxa*). Second, and related, Epictetus develops a theology of a personal God – humans are, Epictetus insists, God's children (see e.g. *Diatr*. 1.3). Humans are akin to a god who even speaks to Epictetus and reassures him that a bit of the divine resides in the human, a faculty of choice and refusal that is guided by use of external impressions (*Diatri*. 1.1.10–12).

A broader philosophical-theological battle in antiquity raged: Did the Stoic 'doctrine' of Fate mean that humans had no capacity for free will? Did it lead to determinism, albeit of a different sort than Epicurean atomism?[41] Practices of sortition and Tatian's riff on it are responses to these theological and scientific struggles over the origins of the world and how those origins continue to impact chains of causation.

Tatian sails his theological ship toward the sort of Stoic thought represented in Epictetus.[42] But note that we should not oppose Stoic thought to the *sortes* that we have seen, whether in the lot oracle inscriptions especially centered in Asia Minor or the manuscripts used to reconstruct various versions of the Sortes Astrampsychi. In the case of Epictetus, in the case of Tatian, in the case of the man casting dice outside a basilica at Kremna, or a woman consulting the specialist who holds the Sortes Astrampsychi: in any of these cases, individuals are engaging the concept of Fate.[43]

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40 Epictetus, *Discourses Books 1–2*, trans. W. A. Oldfather, LCL 131 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 11, 13.

41 See Ricardo Salles, ed., *God and Cosmos in Stoicism*, section 1: "God, Providence, and Fate" (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009).

42 Troels Engberg-Pedersen, *Paul and the Stoics* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000).

43 Carolyn Steedman's *Dust: The Archive and Cultural History* is interested in how the Magistrate or Archon defines and authorizes the archive. She develops her ideas from Derrida's work on archives and demonstrates the way in which some materials produced

Tatian resists the way in which the *sortes* constrain the self as desiring so many things that it anxiously consults, opening itself to the *daimones*' deceptions about fate, even if only in the moment of the casting of the *astragaloi*.[44] Tatian resists the way in which this is a *desiring* self: desiring military command, desiring riches, just desiring – chained by *epithymia* or *porneia*. This is a self that constrains itself into the confident asking of questions and seeking after answers but that nonetheless lies awake in bed at night awash in anxiety.

Tatian, having catalogued his rejection of the kind of questions that haunt those who haunt *sortes*, concludes with Ecclesiastes-style overtones:

> I see the sun is the same for all, one death for all on account of pleasure and degradation. The rich person sows, and the poor has a share of his or her seed. The richest persons meet their end, and beggars have the same limit to life. The wealthy crave more and more, and through their good credit scores they seek after glory, but the poor person who pursues moderation, who aims at what is appropriate to him, is easily superior.
>
> *Or. Graec.* 11

High infant mortality, hunger and famine, the threat of enslavement for some, the frequency of travel: these are the common conditions of antiquity, where from 97 to 99 per cent of the population, according to various economists, lived at or below subsistence level.[45] Tatian takes on not only the voice

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for the archive both construct and constrain identity. In late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England, she argues, "the Magistrate listened then, to the stories of the *miserabiles personae* with whose care he was charged. A modern autobiographical canon may still be made up of the writings of elite men and women, but in England at least, from the seventeenth century onwards, the emerging administrative state demanded that it was in fact the poor who told their story, in vast proportion to their vast numbers" (45). Specifically, eighteenth-century philanthropic organizations "often demanded a story in exchange for its dole" (48). These autobiographies are constrained by the kinds of questions that the magistrate asks and the legal minutiae that it is his job to pursue: whether someone expelled from a home in which she works is a servant or a slave, for example. The term Steedman uses is "formulaic self-narration" (46): "they are written accounts produced by questioning, but from which, in transcription, the interlocutor has been removed" (47).

44 Admittedly the self that is constrained by the *sortes* seems usually to be a male-self living at higher than subsistence level, but sometimes it is a slave-self.

45 Steven J. Friesen and Walter Scheidel, "The Size of the Economy and the Distribution of Income in the Roman Empire," *JRS* 99 (2009): 61–91; Peter Garnsey and Greg Woolf, "Patronage of the Rural Poor in the Roman World," in *Patronage in Ancient Society*, ed. Andrew Wallace-Hadrill (London: Routledge, 1989): 153–70; Justin J. Meggitt, *Paul, Poverty, and Survival* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998).

of Ecclesiastes, but also the voice of a philosopher as he insists upon the inevitability of death with a moral exhortation toward moderation. Tatian's conclusions to his catalogue include a kind of resistance or correction to an age of anxiety:

> What do I care if, on account of fate, you cannot sleep because of your love of money? What do I care if, on account of fate, often yearning, you often die? Die to this world by rejecting the madness within it. Seek God, rejecting the old creation through direct apprehension (καταλήψεως) of him.
>
> *Or. Graec.* 11

5 Other Anxious People

Tatian is not the only one to connect dice, *sortes*, and anxiety, and to resist the *sortes*. His perspective is not a product of his Christian identity, or of his barbarian flag. We find a more direct portrait of the anxious *sortes* pursuer in the *Erotes*, a second-century writing that is either the work of the satirist Lucian of Samosata or someone imitating him.

The *Erotes* (*Amores* or *Affairs of the Heart*) give an example of dice or *astragaloi* being thrown not in useless play,[46] but for the purpose of prognostication. The moment comes within a story of a young man so obsessed with the Knidian Aphrodite's statue that he spends all day mooning about at her temple carving messages to and about her on nearby trees and walls. Indeed, one night he slips into the temple to fulfill his desire with her marble form.

The passage offers a caricature of the person who uses dice oracles as a way of coping with – or failing to cope with – uncertainty and desire:

> All day long he would sit facing the goddess with his eyes fixed uninterruptedly upon her, whispering indistinctly and carrying on a lover's complaints in secret conversation. But when he wished to give himself some little comfort from his suffering, after first addressing the goddess, he would count out on the table four knuckle-bones of a Libyan gazelle and take a gamble on his expectations. If he made a successful throw and particularly if ever he was blessed with the throw named after the goddess herself, and no dice showed the same face, he would prostrate

46 The only such example in the Lucianic corpus, where all other references are to dice playing from what I can tell.

> himself before the goddess, thinking he would gain his desire. But, if as usually happens he made an indifferent throw on to his table, and the dice revealed an unpropitious result, he would curse all Knidos and show utter dejection as if at an irremediable disaster; but a minute later he would snatch up the dice and try to cure by another throw his earlier lack of success.
>
> *Amores* 15–16[47]

The young man is so pathetic as to desire the goddess, and so pathetic as to cast *astragaloi* in an obsessive manner, his heart rising with hope when the cast echoes Venus herself, his heart in his throat with grief when the cast indicates that he will not have the goddess.

The passage shows that some throws are associated with certain gods. It also offers a satiric psychology: the casting of *astragaloi* is an emotional and even tumultuous affair. On the one hand, the narrator claims that casting *astragaloi* distracts the practitioner and thus soothes him (the verb is ἀποβουκολέω). On the other hand, a bad cast leads to misery and another attempt: "and, after a little, he would seize another throw in order that he might cure his previous failing" (καὶ δι' ὀλίγου συναρπάσας ἑτέρῳ βόλῳ τὴν πρὶν ἀστοχίαν ἐθεράπευεν).

The writer offers a brief satire of an individual who is theologically deranged. He may remind us of Plutarch's injunction in *On Superstition* that the atheist is to be preferred to the person who embraces *deisidaimonia*: so pious or so divinity-fearing that his or her obsessions lead to ritual over performance and are grounded in bad theology: a trembling fear of the gods. The casting of the *astragaloi* does not lead to piety, even if it is out of love of Aphrodite that he acts. *Sortes* instead lead to actions that are compulsive and irreligious.

6 Conclusions

An age of anxiety is Tatian's rhetorical construction. Yet this ancient rhetoric, with its polemics, is presented as fact by the likes of Dodds and others into a story of antiquity. This historiography often celebrates a hopeful Christian theology, on the one hand, and the power of modern rationalism, on the other.[48]

47 Lucian, vol. 8, trans. M. D. MacLeod, LCL 432 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 173, 175.

48 Denzey, "Enslavement to Fate."

Tatian, as I have argued, echoes the *sortes* and rejects them. He also argues against the *daimones* who confuse humans with astrology and ideas of fate with this statement:

> οὐκ ἐγενόμεθα πρὸς τὸ ἀποθνήσκειν, ἀποθνήσκομεν δὲ δι' ἑαυτούς. ἀπώλεσεν ἡμᾶς τὸ αὐτεξούσιον· δοῦλοι γεγόναμεν οἱ ἐλεύθεροι, διὰ τὴν ἁμαρτίαν ἐπράθημεν. οὐδὲν φαῦλον ὑπὸ τοῦ θεοῦ πεποίηται, τὴν πονηρίαν ἡμεῖς ἀνεδείξαμεν· οἱ δὲ ἀναδείξαντες δυνατοὶ πάλιν παραιτήσασθαι.
>
> We were not born to die, but we die through ourselves. Free will has destroyed us. The free have become slaves; we have been sold on account of sin. Nothing bad has been done by God; we ourselves have shown forth wickedness, but we who have shown it still have the power to reject it.

Shuttling somewhat incoherently between free will (αὐτεξούσιον) and slavery, Tatian among other philosophers and theologians argues that fate does not control humans. Rather, people act freely, and that freedom leads to wickedness, destruction, enslavement. God is not to blame. Tatian offers hope: that humans still have the power to act. And perhaps, despite Tatian's distaste, they act precisely by consulting *sortes*.

CHAPTER 14

"Only Do Not Be of Two Minds": Doubt in Christian Lot Divination

AnneMarie Luijendijk[1]

There is always an element of doubt involved in the practice of divination. Doubt, in fact, frames the interaction between the client and the expert. First, doubt or insecurity about making a decision or about the future prompts a divinatory inquiry, and second, after the session, there is the possibility of doubting the answer. While these elements are common to all oracular consultations, it is intriguing that the explicit vocabulary of doubt is practically absent in pre-Christian divinatory texts but abundant in later Christian systems. Through a close examination, we can trace the development of the technical vocabulary of doubt in Christian oracular consultations quite clearly and watch early Christian authors legitimize the phenomenon of divination by linking it with prayer.

1 Doubt in the Gospel of the Lots of Mary

This interest in the role of doubt in divination derives from my work on the Gospel of the Lots of Mary, a newly discovered divinatory text that abounds with the language of doubt.[2] Hence that text plays a central role in the argument of this chapter. It is a Christian lot book preserved in a fifth- or sixth-century miniature codex, written in the Sahidic dialect of the Egyptian language. Every two facing pages of the book display one oracular answer that consists of a string of short, straightforward sentences. The text does not have a narrative progression or otherwise recognizable method of organization. Since page numbering is inconsistent, the diviner and client probably reached an answer through

1 My warm thanks to Bill Klingshirn for being a conversation partner on sortilege for many years and for his help with this chapter, and to the participants in the conference for their scholarly contributions to this field. I am grateful to Brent Nongbri for his helpful feedback and to my research assistant Nathan C. Johnson for his help. The New Testament is quoted from Nestle-Aland 28; Bible translations from the NRSV.

2 AnneMarie Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles? The Gospel of the Lots of Mary*, STAC 89 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2014). The following paragraph summarizes some of my findings in that book.

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bibliomancy. As a composition, the text draws heavily on two distinct traditions: traditional divinatory materials and the Christian Scriptures of both the Old and New Testament (understood broadly). The text contains allusions to multiple biblical books. Among these are especially the Psalms, but also other texts, such as Job, Proverbs, the Gospel of Matthew, and, as we shall see later, the Epistle of James and the Shepherd of Hermas. The interweaving of divinatory and scriptural phrases has resulted in a lot text with a distinctly biblical feel. Yet as a whole, this is not a traditional Christian text. God plays the lead role, but Jesus is featured only three times, and Mary once in the title. One looks in vain for such seemingly core late antique Christian topics as martyrs, caring for the poor, or fasting.[3] The everyday lot text allows glimpses into a milieu that is otherwise difficult to see: thoroughly Christian, yet not Christocentric; religious, but not otherworldly. This text caters to an audience that is invested in the here and now.

Repeatedly, the Gospel of the Lots of Mary exhorts clients not to doubt, as indicated with two synonymous terms: doubt and doublemindedness.[4] The exhortation is phrased as "don't doubt," or "don't be double-minded." Often placed at the closure of an answer, the repeated recommendation not to doubt functions almost as a refrain in this text.[5] Already the book's *incipit* concludes cautiously: "only do not be of two minds" (ⲟⲩ ⲙⲟⲛⲟⲛ ⲛ̅ⲧⲙ̅ⲣϩⲏⲧ ⲥⲛⲁⲩ). Oracle 25 suggests that God's mercy is linked to not doubting: "Do not be of two minds, because God is merciful" (ⲛ̅ⲧⲙ̅ⲣϩⲏⲧⲥⲛⲁⲩ ϫⲉ ⲟⲩⲱⲁⲛϩⲏⲧϥ ⲡⲉ ⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ). In the subsequent sentence, the same oracle provides a theological rationale for the answers, claiming: "It is he (God) who will bring about your request (ⲡⲉⲕⲁⲓⲧⲏⲙⲁ) for you and do away with the affliction in your heart."[6] In other words: the oracle understands that God will dispel doubts through the divinatory answer.

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3 William Klingshirn portrays a similar worldview in the roughly contemporary Latin Sortes Sangallenses, a Christian text circulating in Gaul. He observes that the text "promote[s] a basic decency towards others," but that Christian topics such as "forgiveness, bodily pleasures, or material prosperity" do not play a role. See William E. Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul: The Sortes Sangallenses," in *Mantikê: Studies in Ancient Divination*, ed. Peter T. Struck and Sarah Iles Johnston, RGRW 155 (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 99–128, here 112.

4 The vocabulary of doubt and doublemindedness in this text is as follows: The composer used the Graeco-Coptic word ⲇⲓⲥⲧⲁⲍⲉ (διστάζω) 'to doubt' and Coptic ϩⲏⲧ ⲥⲛⲁⲩ and ⲣϩⲏⲧ ⲥⲛⲁⲩ for 'doublemindedness' and 'to be double-minded' respectively, presumably rendering the Greek concept of διψυχία; see also below.

5 Franziska Naether (*Die Sortes Astrampsychi: Problemlösungsstrategien durch Orakel im römischen Ägypten*, ORA 3 [Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2010], 178–88) collected the exhortations presented at the end of answers in the Sortes Astrampsychi. They contain such exclamations as, "don't be afraid" and "don't hurry," but never "don't doubt"; see also below.

6 For the full oracle and literary allusions, see Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?* 131.

An answer with the formula "do not doubt" reads: "Do not let go of the faith in your heart. You have God as helper. He will guide you on the path on which you will go. At all events, do not doubt (ⲙⲟⲛⲟⲛ ⲙ̄ⲡ̄ⲣ̄ⲇⲓⲥⲇⲁⲍⲉ) because nothing is impossible for God" (no. 12).[7] Or one could receive as a response: "Do not doubt in your heart (ⲙ̄ⲡ̄ⲣ̄ⲧⲓⲥⲇⲁⲍⲉ ⲉⲙ̄ ⲡⲉⲕϩⲏⲧ) nor walk in the counsels of vain people" (no. 15).[8] Two oracles combine trust in God with not doubting: "Trust in God and do not be of two minds" (ⲕⲁϩⲧⲏⲕ ⲉⲡⲛⲟⲩⲧⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲙ̄ϩⲏⲧ ⲥⲛⲁⲩ, nos. 11, 30).[9]

Why does this lot book contain such frequent admonitions against doubt and doublemindedness? In the absence of concrete life situations, an exegesis of this and other divinatory texts is impossible, since divinatory answers are deliberately ambiguous and open to multiple interpretations. Oracles require interpretation in a dialogue with a diviner and client.[10] Nevertheless, I identify

7 This oracle is also preserved verbatim in a Coptic bifolio from Antinoë, edited by Lucia Papini, ("Fragments of the Sortes Sanctorum from the Shrine of St Colluthus," in *Pilgrimage and Holy Space in Late Antique Egypt*, ed. David Frankfurter, RGRW 134 [Leiden: Brill, 1998], 399) and in Greek in the *rhiktologion* edited by F. Drexl: ὅπου γὰρ θέλεις, ἄνθρωπε, πορεύου ταχέως εἰς ταύτην τὴν ὁδόν σου καὶ μὴ διστάσῃς. τὸν θεὸν γὰρ ἔχεις βοηθόν σου, "For wherever you want, O human, travel quickly on that road of yours and do not doubt. For you have God as your helper" (5, lines 16–18; Drexl, "Ein griechisches Losbuch," *ByzZ* 41 (1941): 311–18, here 313). See Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?* 116 and discussion below.

8 Another answer instructs its recipient about perceived uncertainty: "Stop being of two minds (ϩⲏⲧ ⲥⲛⲁⲩ), O human, whether this thing will happen or not. Yes, it will happen! Be brave and do not be of two minds (ⲛ̄ⲧⲙ̄ϩⲏⲧ ⲥⲛⲁⲩ)" (no. 24). I propose that the expression "do not doubt" in the Gospel of the Lots of Mary, with the Graeco-Egyptian verb διστάζω, 'to doubt,' can have the connotation of 'don't worry.' This is how I translate the idiom in a private letter from the second century CE, preserved on papyrus. Stationed in the military in Italy, a man writes to his mother back home in Egypt to reassure her that he is doing fine: "I ask you then, mother, take care of yourself, do not doubt about me, for I have come to a good place." ἐρωτῶ σε οὖν, μήτηρ, σεαυτῇ πρόσεχε, μηδὲν δίσταζε περὶ ἐμοῦ· ἐγὼ γὰρ εἰς καλὸν τόπον ἦλθον (P.Mich. VIII 491). The sentence, literally translated, "don't doubt" or "don't hesitate about me" (μηδὲν δίσταζε περὶ ἐμοῦ), clearly means, in colloquial expression, "don't worry about me, Mom." Therefore, depending on the client's situation, the exhortation not to doubt could also be interpreted as a reassurance: "don't hesitate (about the decision)," or even "don't worry." SB III 6663 (6–5 BCE), a petition involving a loan, reads: χρηματίζωσι αὐτοῖς κατὰ μηδὲν διστάσαντες (lines 34–35). The verb thus may have a legal connotation.

9 Two additional responses serve as a contrast to the emphasis on putting one's trust in God and instead warn against relying on humans: "Do not trust the words of people" (ⲙ̄ⲡ̄ⲣ̄ⲕⲁϩⲧⲏⲕ ⲉⲛⲑⲁⲓⲉ ⲛ̄ⲛⲣⲱⲙⲉ, no. 33); and, "You shall not be able to trust them, nor will you be able to take courage in their words (ⲛ̄ⲧⲛⲁⲱ ⲡⲓⲥⲧⲉⲩⲉ ⲛⲁⲩ ⲁⲛ ⲟⲩⲇⲉ ⲛ̄ⲧⲛⲁⲱ ⲑⲁⲣⲓ ⲁⲛ ⲛ̄ⲧⲉⲩⲥⲓⲛⲑⲁⲓⲉ, no. 35).

10 David Zeitlyn, "Finding Meaning in the Text: The Process of Interpretation in Text-Based Divination," *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 7 (2001): 225–40, here 227: "When

several possible modes of reasoning in the text. I will first discuss doubt as a form of uncertainty about life decisions, and then the fact that one can doubt the answer.

2 Lots and the Vicissitudes of Life

The purpose of lot books is to give people insight into future or hidden things or counsel in situations that are difficult to decide.[11] In this scenario, it is the role of a diviner, to quote David Frankfurter, to "impose certainty on a situation characterized by doubts."[12] Insights of ethnographers affirm this aspect of divination as an aid in making difficult decisions. E. M. Zeusse postulates that "divination illuminates suffering and alleviates doubt,"[13] and David Zeitlyn observes: "the usual perceived purpose of divination [is] to find answers to questions. Generally, divination is used as a means of resolving problems."[14]

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texts figure in divination, diviners have a dual role. At each consultation they must satisfy themselves, their client, and a possible audience that they have followed the correct procedures to identify the verse or text chosen by the divination. Then follows a second stage. The client has a particular question, but the text selected was not composed to answer it. Interpretation is needed to satisfy the client that the question has been answered." See also Susan Reynolds Whyte, *Questioning Misfortune: The Pragmatics of Uncertainty in Eastern Uganda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 65. For a productive use of these and other ethnographic studies in the interpretation of late antique *sortes*, see especially Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul."

11 "Losbücher, mit deren Hilfe Menschen Einblick in zukünftige oder verborgene Dinge zu gewinnen hofften oder auch Rat in schwierigen Entscheidungssituationen suchten" (Evelyn Burkhardt, "Hebräische Losbuchhandschriften: Zur Typologie einer jüdischen Divinationsmethode," in *Jewish Studies Between the Disciplines – Judaistik zwischen den Disziplinen: Papers in Honor of Peter Schäfer on the Occasion of his 60th Birthday*, ed. Klaus Herrmann, Margarete Schlüter, Giuseppe Veltri [Leiden: Brill, 2003], 95). See also David Ratzan's contribution to this volume. On the difficulties that the ancients faced and what range of copying mechanism they had, see Jacco Dieleman, "Coping with a Difficult Life: Magic, Healing, and Sacred Knowledge," in *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*, ed. Christina Riggs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 337–61.

12 David Frankfurter, "Syncretism and the Holy Man in Late Antique Egypt," *JECS* 11 (2003): 339–85, here 383.

13 E. M. Zuesse, "Divination," in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, ed. M. Eliade, vol. 4 (New York: Macmillan, 1987), 375–82, here 380.

14 David Zeitlyn, "Divination as Dialogue: The Negotiation of Meaning with Random Responses," in *Social Intelligence and Interaction: Expression and Implications of the Social Bias in Human Intelligence*, ed. Esther N. Goody (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 189–205, here 189. Johannes Bolte ("Zur Geschichte der Punktier – und Losbücher," in *Jahrbuch für historische Volkskunde*, vol. 1: *Volkskunde und ihre Grenzgebiete*, ed. Wilhelm Fraenger [Berlin: Herbert Stubenrauch, 1925], 185–214) has shown that people

Thus, although the text of the Gospel of the Lots of Mary repeatedly admonishes the reader not to doubt, doubt forms a constitutive part of divination. Ancient authors realized this.[15] In his famous conversion account, Augustine of Hippo credits his divinatory experience with "dispelling doubt." Hearing a child's voice repeat the words "pick up, read," he reflects:

> I interpreted it solely as a divine command to me to open the book and read the first chapter I might find.... At once, with the last words of this sentence, it was as if a light of relief from anxiety flooded into my heart. All the *shadows of doubt* were dispelled (*omnes dubitationis tenebrae diffugerunt*).[16]

Similarly, in his reflections on Psalm 30, Augustine observes: "For a lot ... is a thing that indicates the divine will in *human doubt* (*in dubitatione humana*)."[17] When you are very certain about your life, you do not need to consult an oracle. It is when making decisions that the search for answers begins. Thus divination is driven by doubt. It is precisely situations of uncertainty and am-

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begin to play lighthearted games of divination by the end of the fifteenth century. He bases this on "scherzhafte Losbücher, die oft ausdrücklich versichern, daß sie keinen Glauben beansprüchen" (198).

15 In his *De divinatione*, Cicero defines divination (he uses the Greek word μαντική) as "the foresight and knowledge of future matters" (*praesensionem et scientiam rerum futurarum*). See Cicero, *Div.* 1.1 (trans. William Armistead Falconer, LCL 154). Cf. 1.5.9: divination "which is the prediction and foresight of those things which are thought to be fortuitous" (*quae est earum rerum, quae fortuitae putantur, praedictio atque praesensio*). Lucian of Samosata (c. 125–180 CE) notes that the prophet Alexander of Abonoteichus (whom he called "Alexander the False Prophet") was acutely aware that "both to the one who fears and to the one who hopes, foreknowledge (πρόγνωσις) is very essential and very keenly coveted." Lucian, *Alex.* 8,trans. A. M. Harmon, LCL 162 (1925), 185.

16 Augustine, *Conf.* 8.12.29 (CCSL 27:131; trans. Henry Chadwick, *Confessions* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008], 152–53): *Interpretans diuinitus mihi iuberi, nisi ut aperirem codicem et legerem quod primum caput inuenissem.... Statim quippe cum fine huiusce sententiae quasi luce securitatis infusa cordi meo omnes dubitationis tenebrae diffugerunt*. After his conversion, Augustine develops a lively interest in divination, which he considers a means of communicating God's knowledge, according to William E. Klingshirn, "Divination and the Disciplines of Knowledge according to Augustine," in *Augustine and the Disciplines: From Cassiciacum to Confessions*, ed. Karla Pollmann and Mark Vessey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 113–40, 115.

17 Augustine, *Enarrat. Ps.*, sermon 2, 13 (CCSL 38:211). Augustine has a long passage on this verse, *In manibus tuis sortes meae*, "My lots are in your hands," in this sermon. He writes: *Sors enim non aliquid mali est; sed res est in dubitatione humana diuinam indicans uoluntatem* ("For a lot is not something bad, but it is a thing indicating the divine will in human doubt"). On Psalm 30, see also the Introduction of this volume, 12–14.

bivalence that direct supplicants to divination. Doubt is the catalyst to inquiry in the first place. The exhortations in the Gospel of the Lots of Mary against doubting function as acknowledgment of problems and worries that brought the client to consult the diviner.

Other late antique lot books also refer to this sort of existential doubt that leads a person to consult an instant oracle.[18] Two answers in a so-called *rhiktologion*, a Greek lot text, admonish against doubting: (5) "Walk quickly on this path of yours and do not doubt (καὶ μὴ διστάσῃς)" and (10) "In this many bear ill-will against you. And do not doubt (καὶ μὴ διστάζῃς)."[19] The earliest full copy of this text is a Byzantine manuscript copied in 1339, now at the Bibliothèque nationale in Paris.[20] But a fifth-century Greek papyrus, PSI XVII Congr. 5, preserves a similar text, if only fragmentarily and unfortunately without parallels to these two answers.[21] Nevertheless, the papyrus raises the possibility that the sections against doubting were already in circulation in late antiquity. This is also the case with Latin *sortes*.

18 The dates for these texts are difficult to ascertain given the transmission of *sortes*.

19 See respectively Drexl, "Ein griechisches Losbuch," 313 (no. 5) πορεύου ταχέως εἰς ταύτην τὴν ὁδόν σου καὶ μὴ διστάσῃς, and 314 (no. 10) ἐν τούτῳ πολλοὶ φθονοῦσιν κατὰ σου. καὶ μὴ διστάζῃς. ὑπόμεινον πρὸς ὀλίγον, καὶ τὰ αἰτήματα σου γενήσονται. See also n. 7 above.

20 BNF gr. 2243 (folio 643–647). A second manuscript, BNF gr. 2149, is probably a sixteenth-century copy of 2243; so ibid. For BNF gr. 2243, both the name of the scribe and the person who commissioned the codex is known: Kosmas Kamelos, a priest and exarch of Athens, copied the manuscript, a scholarly book containing pharmacological recipes, including the *rhiktologion*, in the year 1339 for a physician. On this manuscript, see, for instance, ibid., 312; Henri Léonard Bordier, *Description des peintures et autres ornements contenus dans les manuscrits grecs de la Bibliothèque nationale* (Paris: H. Champion, 1883), 257–59; Marie-Claude Bianchini, ed., *Byzance, l'art byzantin dans les collections publiques françaises: Musée du Louvre, 3 novembre 1992, 1er février 1993* (Paris: Éditions de la Réunion des musées nationaux, 1992), 454–55; Iohannis Spatharakis, *Corpus of Dated Illuminated Greek Manuscripts to the Year 1453*, Byzantina Neerlandica 8 (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 62–63. A nineteenth-century Greek manuscript has a similar text: edition by Georgios A. Megas, "ΡΙΚΤΟΛΟΓΙΟΝ ΕΞ ΑΜΟΡΓΟΥ," *ΕΠΙΣΤΗΜΟΝΙΚΗ ΕΠΕΤΗΡΙΣ* 9 (1958): 207–16. This *rhiktologion* was copied at the Greek island of Amorgos on October 22, 1847 by a certain Michael Nomikos (ibid., 216).

21 Paul Canart and Rosario Pintaudi, "PSI XVII Congr. 5: Un système d'oracles chrétiens ('Sortes Sanctorum')," *ZPE* 57 (1984): 85–90. According to Canart, the author of the first section of the article, the *sortes* in this papyrus (PSI XVII Congr. 5) are not just parallel with the *rhiktologion*, but the textual similarities and overlaps are so numerous that they must have a common ancestor even if perhaps the papyrus presents a different recension. He writes (p. 88) that "the *rhiktologion* is the reappearance, some nine or ten centuries later, of *sortes* in use in the proto-byzantine period, if not later" ("Le ῥικτολόγιον est la résurgence, quelque neuf à dix siècles plus tard, de 'sortes' en usage à l'époque proto-byzantine, sinon plus tôt").

The Sortes Sangallenses are Latin lots probably related to Greek lot books.[22] They are fragmentarily preserved in a palimpsest manuscript from around the year 600 in the Sankt Gallen monastery in Switzerland.[23] The preserved parts contain eight answers with the noun *dubio* (doubt) or the verb *dubitare* (to be uncertain, doubt).[24] Most of those are cryptic – which is useful for an oracle book – and do not easily fit the explanation of the insecure situation that led a client to consult the oracle. However, a useful example for this project is Sortes Sangallenses (XL) V: "What you consult about is doubtful; pray to God" (*dubium est, de quo consulis; ora d*[*eu*]*m*).[25]

A better match is the so-called Sortes Sanctorum, a lot text attested as early as the early ninth century.[26] Referring to the biblical lot stories of Jonah and

22 Klingshirn, "Christian Divination in Late Roman Gaul," 101: "All these texts [including the Sortes Sanctorum, Monacenses, Sangermanenses, Sangallenses]… were written in Latin but translated or adapted from Greek models; they can be organized into definite families based on those models; and they can be labeled, to a greater or lesser degree, 'Christian.' They are also in many respects very difficult to place in their proper context."

23 About the date of the manuscript, Klingshirn writes: "While this observation frustrates efforts to establish a precise date, it also suggests that the *Sortes Sangallenses* could have served as a practical handbook for divination at any time from the late fourth to late sixth centuries. With a text that could easily be altered … the *Sortes Sangallenses* did not have to fall out of date, and we must assume, was not considered out of date when it was copied for the last time, apparently around 600" (ibid., 105).

24 Sortes Sangallenses, cited from Alban Dold, *Die Orakelsprüche im St. Galler Palimpsestcodex 908* (*die sogenannten "Sortes Sangallenses"*), vol. 225/4, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasses. Sitzungsberichte (Vienna: Rudolf M. Rohrer, 1948). (XII) XII: *in dubio erit condemnatior*, "The condemnation will be in doubt" (ibid., 85). As Richard Meister explains in his commentary, "Die Eigenartige Bildung condemnatior … wird man nicht als Korruptel, sondern als 'umgekehrte Schreibung' gegenüber Nominativen auf – to statt – tor deuten dürfen" (*Die Orakelsprüche im St. Galler Palimpsestcodex 908* (*die sogenannten "Sortes Sangallenses"*). *Erläuterungen*, Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften. Philosophisch-historische Klasses. Sitzungsberichte [Vienna: Rudolf M. Rohrer, 1951], 15). In other words, *condemnatior* = *condemnatio* (ibid., 14). (XIII) I: *habebis fidem, sed semper in dubio est* (Dold, *Die Orakelsprüche im St. Galler Palimpsestcodex 908*, 85), "You will have faith, but it is always in doubt." (XIV) XII: *in dubio erit, sed non morietur inimicus tuus* (ibid., 87), "He/she/it will be in doubt, but your enemy will not die." (XXIII) V: *cum sint accepti et extranei apud personam domnicam, tu dubitas*? (ibid., 93) "When even foreigners are in favor with the lord's official, do you doubt (that you are)?" (XXXIV) III: *in dubio est uenire* (ibid., 101), "It is doubtful to come." (XL) V: *dubium est, de quo consulis; ora d*[*eu*]*m* (ibid., 107), "What you consult about is doubtful; pray to God." (XLIII) VIIII: *in dubio eris, sed euadis* (ibid., 109), "You will be in doubt, but you will evade." (LII) I: *in dubio est fortuna tua* (ibid., 115), "Your fortune/fate is in doubt."

25 Dold, *Die Orakelsprüche im St. Galler Palimpsestcodex 908*, 107.

26 The Sortes Sanctorum are also known as the Sortes of Pithoeus, after the editor of the first printed edition, Pierre Pithou (1539–1596) (published posthumously in 1687); see William E. Klingshirn, "Defining the Sortes Sanctorum: Gibbon, Du Cange, and Early

Matthias, the text begins with the prayer: "Disclose, Lord, the doubts which are in our hearts through this lot" (*dubia quae sunt in cordibus nostris per hanc sortem*).[27] The first answer in these *sortes* promises that a doubtful mind will become clear again:

> C.C.C. *Post solem surgunt stellae, sol iam ad lucem revertitur, sic et tuus animus, unde dubius esse videtur, in brevi tempore ad claritatem pervenerit et veniet tibi, Deo adjuvante, et obtinebis quae cupis. Age ei gratias.*
>
> After the sun the stars come out and the sun already recovers its light. So too in a short time will your mind return to brightness from the point

Christian Lot Divination," *JECS* 10 (2002): 77–130, here 80; Fritz Graf, "Rolling the Dice for an Answer," in Struck and Johnston, *Mantikê*, 51–98, here 79. Pithou's edition is based on a twelfth-century manuscript currently in the Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin, MS Phill. 1775 (Klingshirn, "Defining the Sortes Sanctorum," 91). The earliest manuscript of the text is from the early ninth century, now in Paris, BNF MS lat 2796. A ninth-century manuscript now in Madrid preserves the earliest complete copy of this text; the *sortes* themselves are written in a tenth – or eleventh-century hand (ibid., 93) For the critical edition see Enrique Montero Cartelle and Alberto Alonso Guardo, *Los "libros de suertes" medievales: las "Sortes sanctorum" y los "Prenostica Socratis basilei": estudio, traducción y edición crítica* (Madrid: Consejo Superior de Investigaciones Científicas, 2004) and recently Enrique Montero Cartelle, ed., *Les sortes sanctorum: étude, édition critique et traduction*, Textes littéraires du Moyen Âge 27, Série Divinatoria 3 (Paris: Classiques Garnier, 2013).

27 The prayer reads: *Aperi, Domine, dubia quae sunt in cordibus nostris per hanc sortem, et dirige eam sicut direxisti sortem nautarum qui naufragium patiebantur, quando cecidit sors super Jonam, et sicut direxisti sortem Apostolorum tuorum, quando cecidit sors super Mathiam*. "Disclose, Lord, the doubts which are in our hearts through this lot, and direct it just as you have directed the lot of the sailors who were suffering shipwreck, when the lot fell on Jonah, and just as you have directed the lot of your apostles, when the lot fell on Matthias." Editions: Montero Cartelle and Alonso Guardo, *Los "libros de suertes" medievales*, 43; and James Rendel Harris, *The Annotators of the Codex Bezae* (*with Some Notes on Sortes Sanctorum*) (London: C. J. Clay, 1901), Appendix B, 118. This prayer appears in most manuscripts of the text: those in Berlin (MS P, Montero, 43), Getty Museum (MS C, Montero, 47, with slight differences), Venice (MS V, 51), Cologne (MS C^2, Montero, 53), Vienna (MS O, Montero, 58, with slight differences). See also Montero Cartelle, *Les sortes sanctorum*, 46. The text exists also in Provençal translation (by Rocquain), see Harris, *The Annotators of the Codex Bezae*, 118; Montero Cartelle and Alonso Guardo, *Los "libros de suertes" medievales*, 55. It follows after the Pater Noster. Jonah is referred to again in the next prayer (without mention of lots: *qui exaudisti Ionam de ventre ceti*). According to Harris (*The Annotators of the Codex Bezae*, 118), the *Sortes of Pithou* have a Greek *Vorlage*. So also Montero Cartelle and Alonso Guardo, *Los "libros de suertes" medievales*, 21: "dada la abundancia de sistemas adivinatorios similares egipcios, todo parece apuntar a un precedente griego."

> where it seems to be in doubt and it will come to you, with God's help, and you will obtain the things you desire. Give him thanks.[28]

Multiple additional answers in the Sortes Sanctorum also refer to doubt or its absence.[29]

Finally, the Sortes Monacenses contains two exhortations not to doubt that can allude to the existential doubt that leads people to consult oracles:[30]

> 8. l. VI. V. III. *caue ne dubites; iam nunc incipe et perficies quod desideras et peruenies ad in manibus tuis quod dubius esse; quod speras a te omiti non debet quod perueniet*.[31]

> Take care not to doubt (or 'not to hesitate'); begin now already and you will accomplish what you wish and you will arrive in your hands at what [you are] doubtful of; what you hope should not be omitted/let go (omiti for omitti) by you because it will happen.

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28 Edition: Montero Cartelle, *Les sortes sanctorum*, 72. For a slightly different text see Montero Cartelle and Alonso Guardo, *Los "libros de suertes" medievales*, 70. Trans. modified from Klingshirn, "Defining the Sortes Sanctorum," 95. See also Harris, *The Annotators of the Codex Bezae*, 119.

29 Other answers with the vocabulary of doubting in this text are: C.V.III. *Ne dubitare velis de quo consulis. Roga Deum. Bonum est quod petis. Noli timere* (Montero Cartelle, *Les sortes sanctorum*, 76). "Do not doubt about what you want to consult. Ask God. It is good what you ask. Do not fear." C.V.II. *Cervo currente cornua tenere cupis in minibus; iam difficile est quia in silvis moratur, sed revertitur in cubili suo ut tibi capi possit, sic veniet in manibus tuis in quo dubius es*. (ibid.) "You want to hold a running stag by the horns; it is in truth difficult because it remains in the forest, but it returns in its lair where (or: so that) you can seize it. Thus will come in your hands what you doubt about." IIII.II.I. *Votum quod cupis obtinebis. Deum roga ut ipse in auxilium sit tibi. Patiens esto. Noli dubitare de quo interrogas. Securus esto. Veniet tibi, Deo adiuvante, quod desideras*. (ibid., 96) III.II.II. *In quo speras pisces latent et laetus capies eos repente, sic et tuus animus dubius esse videtur*. (ibid., 100) Several of these answers fall into the category of doubting the outcome of the oracle itself. In some instances, the verb *dubitare* can also mean "to hesitate."

30 These *sortes* are preserved in a tenth- or eleventh-century manuscript in the Bayrische Staatsbibliothek in Munich (Cod. Mon. 14846), published as an appendix by Hermann Winnefeld, *Sortes Sangallenses. Adiecta sunt alearum oracula ex codice monacensi primum edita* (Bonn: Max Cohen, 1887), 53–57. I use here the text as printed by Harris, *The Annotators of the Codex Bezae*, Appendix E: The Munich Sortes Alearum.

31 Harris, *The Annotators of the Codex Bezae*, 181.

> 47. g. III. III. I. *noli dubius esse, quia deus te gubernat, sed semper roga deum et sortes facere quod uis*.[32]
>
> Don't be in doubt, because God guides you, but always ask God and the lots to do what you want.

Thus references to doubt in these Greek and Latin divinatory books from late antiquity can indicate the agony of a decision to be made in an insecure life situation. But as we will see next, there is a different aspect too: admonitions not to doubt can be used as a warning that a client should not distrust the answer.

3 Doubt in the Outcome

My second argument is that the emphasis on "do not doubt" can also function on a different level, guaranteeing the reliability of the answer. For the diviner, the admonition against doubting functions as a warranty, a professional safeguard. If clients were to complain that the answer does not apply to their situation, then the diviner can retort that they must have doubted the lot. The oracle cannot be mistaken. It is always right.

The admonition not to doubt thus perhaps indicates that the composers of these divinatory systems expected skepticism from those consulting it. On a larger playing field, this means that these texts participate in the discourse on the validity of divination, a vivid debate in antiquity and beyond.[33] This is exemplified in Roman thought by Cicero's *De divinatione*,[34] and continued by such authors as Porphyry and Iamblichus.[35] Lucian of Samosata displays a skeptical attitude towards divination, describing how he apparently tested the

32 Ibid., 184.

33 In "Divination as Dialogue," 192–93, Zeitlyn discusses the issue of doubt in divination and "the questioners' suspicions of the system" with reference to a study on knowledge conducted by Harold Garfinkel, "Common Sense Knowledge of Social Structures: The Documentary Method of Interpretation in Lay and Professional Fact Finding," in *Studies in Ethnomethodology* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1967), 76–103.

34 On Cicero, see Federico Santangelo, *Divination, Prediction and the End of the Roman Republic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013). More generally, Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, "VIII. Ausgewählte Losorakelkritik," 356–57. Sometimes, the debate is about the persons conducting the oracles. For instance, his imaginary interlocutor, Q. Cicero, the 'Stoic' supporter of divination, approves of lot oracles, but not lot diviners.

35 Especially Porphyry, *Philosophia ex oraculis* and Iamblichus, *De mysteriis aegyptiorum*. See, for instance, Polymnia Athanassiadi, "Dreams, Theurgy and Freelance Divination: The Testimony of Iamblichus," *JRS* 83 (1993): 115–30.

diviner Alexander by handing in trick questions, asking him different questions in person than he had submitted in writing and thus receiving answers to the former, not the latter.[36] In the "do not doubt" admonitions in the Gospel of the Lots of Mary and other late antique texts we thus find a hint that the discourse on divination was not just an abstract, elite scholarly debate, but that everyday clients also might have harbored such sentiments.[37]

Instead of warning clients not to doubt the outcome, several other, mostly earlier lot texts stress that they do not lie. They do so by using the adjective ἀψευδής ('without deceit, truthful, unerring').[38] While the imperatives against doubting place the agency with the client, these claims of truthfulness place it with the text. For example, the prologue of the *sortes* from Antiocheia at the Cragos in Asia Minor entreats the oracle: "give an unerring oracle" (μαντείαν δὸς ἀψευδῆ), that is, give an oracle that does not lie, that is truthful.[39] The Christian version of the Sortes Astrampsychi (*ecdosis altera*) uses the adjective in its opening prayer: "Meet and work with me, your servant, towards the unerring demonstration and confirmation of what is being sought" (σύνελθε

36 Lucian, *Alex*. 54,trans. Harmon, LCL 162 (1925), 243.

37 See also Naether's discussion on prejudice and doubt regarding oracles: "Es existieren bei Zahlen-, Buchstaben – und Losorakel erhebliche Vorurteile und Zweifel an ihrem Wahrheitsgehalt. Man kann nicht von der Hand weisen, dass findige Geschäftsmacher mit der Sorge der Menschen um die Zukunft mit Hilfe mystifizierender, göttlich sanktionierter Orakelbücher Profit machen wollten" (*Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 356).

38 LSJ s.v. ἀψευδής. This adjective occurs as epithet of Greek gods, particularly Zeus (Ζεὺς ἐν θεοῖσι μάντις ἀψευδέστατος, Archilochus, *Eleg. et Iamb.* fragment 298) and Apollo (Ἀπόλλων, μάντις ἀψευδὴς, Aeschylus, *Cho.* 559) and also in a Christian context referring to God: Titus 1:2: ἐπ' ἐλπίδι ζωῆς αἰωνίου, ἣν ἐπηγγείλατο ὁ ἀψευδὴς θεὸς πρὸ χρόνων αἰωνίων "in the hope of eternal life that the unerring/truthful God promised before the ages."

39 Greek from Johannes Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel: Astragal – und Alphabetchresmologien der hochkaiserzeitlichen Orakelrenaissance*, Vestigia 57 (München: C. H. Beck, 2007), 194, German trans. at 199. See also ibid., 205–6 and a picture of the inscription at table 20a – b. Nollé comments on this term in ibid., 275. The word ἀψευδής is a larger concept in divination; it is an epithet for Sarapis as "untrügliche (Orakel) gottheit." The oracle shows significant Christian influence and anti-Christian polemics, according to Nollé: "In diesem Spruch sind die Anklänge an das Neue Testament unübersehbar" (ibid., 207). This pertains to the use of rare words, Nollé writes, and concepts, such as that of the crown. "Der Eindruck drängt sich auf, daß dieser Spruch gegen die metaphysische Ausrichtung des Christentums polemisiert und die Orakelbefrager auf die erfahrbarere Lebenswirklichkeit der heidnischen Religion verweisen will" (ibid.). If this is indeed correct, then it goes both ways; pagan polemics against Christians and Christian adaptation of pagan texts.

καὶ συνέργησον ἐμοὶ τῷ δούλῳ σου εἰς τὴν ἀψευδῆ τοῦ ζητουμένου δήλωσίν τε καὶ βεβαίωσιν).[40]

Turning to the West with Latin *sortes*, we witness an interesting back and forth.[41] The Sortes Sanctorum begins as follows: *Haec sunt sortes sanctorum quae numquam falluntur* – and some manuscripts add here: *nec mentiuntur* – *ideoque deum roga et optinebis quod cupis* ("These are the lots of the saints which are never in error [nor lie]; therefore ask God and you will obtain what you desire").[42] Significant for the debate against lot divination, it seems to me that polemicists picked up this advertisement of self-credibility and turned it against the practitioners, as the clergy present at the Council of Orléans in 511 decreed, explicitly mentioning the Sortes sanctorum:

> If any cleric, monk, or lay person believes that divination or auguries should be practiced, or thinks that lots that they falsely claim are those of the saints (*sortes quas mentiuntur esse sanctorum*) should be made known to anyone at all, then they, along with those who believe in them, should be expelled from communion with the church (canon 30).[43]

This raises the question: Who is quoting whom here? Do the bishops with their use of the verb *mentiuntur* use the claim in the *sortes* text that they never lie, refuting them with the *sortes*'s own words, or do the *sortes* incorporate – and explicitly deny – claims made against them?[44] In either case, in employing exhortations against doubt and references to lying, these *sortes* stress their own

40 Randall Stewart, *Sortes Astrampsychi*, vol. 2: *Ecdosis altera*, BSGRT (Munich: K. G. Saur, 2001), 2, lines 55–56.

41 An oracular inscription, *ILLRP* 1083, reads: *non sum mendacís quas | dícti: consulis stulte* (Degrassi, *Inscriptiones Latinae Liberae Rei Publicae*, 2 vols., Biblioteca di studi superiori 23, Storia antica ed epigrafia 40 [Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1963], 2:292). Degrassi explains in the accompanying note: "*Sic equidem intellego*: non sum (earum sortium), quas dixisti mendacis." He lists other examples of self-referential *sortes*. In other words: there are accusations of lying and competition between *sortes*.

42 Latin and translation (adapted) from Klingshirn, "Defining the Sortes Sanctorum," 93. The earliest manuscript of the Sortes Sanctorum is Paris, BNF MS lat 2796, early ninth century.

43 *Si quis clericus, monachus, saecularis diuinationem uel auguria crediderit obseruanda, uel sortes quas mentiuntur esse sanctorum quibuscumque putauerint intimandas, cum his qui iis crediderint ab ecclesiae conmunione pellantur*. Latin and translation from Klingshirn, "Defining the Sortes Sanctorum," 87 = canon 30.

44 Klingshirn (ibid., 84–87) has shown that this canon is an adaptation of earlier canons held in Vannes (462–468 CE) and Agde (506 CE). With this term *mentiuntur*, the bishops not only adapted earlier canons, but also show intimate awareness of at least the opening sentence of the *sortes*.

reliability and truthfulness. They thereby both protect the diviner against criticism and participate in the larger discourse on the validity of oracles.

Yet in conducting my research, it struck me that the vocabulary of doubt and doublemindedness is practically absent in other, mainly earlier divinatory texts and abundant in later systems. Therefore, in order to fully appreciate the warnings against doubting in the Gospel of the Lots of Mary, we need to examine related divinatory systems where doubt plays no role and then turn to those where we find similar exhortations.

Only in one instance did I find the verb διστάζω, 'to doubt,' in an earlier divinatory text, namely in the Greek dice oracles from Asia Minor, in an inscription from Antiocheia on the Cragos from the late second or early third century.[45] It reads:

αγδδδ Εὐφροσύνης·
ις
διστάζεις σὺ τὸ κέρδος ἔχων αὐτὸς παρὰ σαυτῷ.
τοῦτο κράτει σώφρων <τε> γενοῦ· μὴ <τ>αῦτ᾽ ἀπαλείψεις·[46]
μή σαυτοῦ τρύχειν ἄρχῃ φρένα καὶ μετὰ ταῦτα.[47]

13444 Of Euphrosyne
16
You yourself doubt yourself, even though you have gain.
Master this and become self-controlled. Do not cancel this.
Do not begin to exhaust your own heart even after this.

Here, however, the doubt is not in the outcome of the oracle, but in one's own abilities (as in my first argument on the insecurity that prompts divination).

Furthermore, while the Sortes Astrampsychi and other texts in its direct family contain many exhortations in the phrases appended to the answers, none of these are against doubting the lot. As Franziska Naether has calculated, the Sortes Astrampsychi give a total of 247 different added-on short exhortatory phrases. That means, she concludes, that about a quarter of the answers end with a brief exhortation.[48] Examples of such sentences are: "don't fear, don't worry, don't be upset, don't expect to be concerned, don't hope for it, don't

45 On this oracle, see Nollé, *Kleinasiatische Losorakel*, 192–211, and 193 for the date.
46 Read as ἀπαλείψῃς, ibid., 197 n. 164.
47 Ibid., 197. German trans. ibid., 201.
48 Naether, *Die Sortes Astrampsychi*, 185: "fast 24% der Antworten [sind] mit einem solchen Kommentar versehen." See her detailed table with all instances in ibid., 178–85.

think about it, don't be distressed, I am warning you, wait, don't rush, be cheerful, see to it, count on it, take heed, stand fast, don't ramble, treat yourself, it's not granted to you, take heed, work at it, someone doesn't trust you, count on it."[49] But despite all this good advice, whether prohibition or encouragement, the Sortes Astrampsychi never orders clients not to doubt.[50]

When we turn to Egypt, the Coptic divinatory manuscript at the Vatican (P.Vat.Copt. 1) – admittedly an incomplete text – also lacks answers that address doubt.[51] Several other Greek and Coptic fragments with Christian *sortes* likewise do not have warnings against doubting, but given their small size, this evidence is inconclusive.[52]

Clearly not all divinatory texts share this anxiety about doubt and doublemindedness. This absence of doubt language in earlier divinatory texts then raises the question: Why does the Gospel of the Lots of Mary place so much emphasis on not doubting?

4 Doubt, Divination, and Prayer

Compared to sister-*sortes* texts, the Gospel of the Lots of Mary is preoccupied with the concept of doubt. So where does this doubt language come from, and what purpose does it serve in the text?

The vocabulary of doubt directs us to an answer. The Coptic word for 'doublemindedness,' ϩⲛⲧ ⲥⲛⲁⲩ, renders the Greek term διψυχία.[53] The term διψυχία

49 Trans. Randall Stewart and Kenneth Morrell, "Fortune-Telling. Anonymous, The Oracles of Astrampsychus," in *Anthology of Ancient Greek Popular Literature*, ed. William F. Hansen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998), 285–324.

50 It has eight exhortations to believe.

51 Edition: Arnold van Lantschoot, "Une collection sahidique de 'Sortes Sanctorum,'" *Mus* 69 (1956): 35–52; English trans. Marvin W. Meyer and Richard Smith, *Ancient Christian Magic: Coptic Texts of Ritual Power* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 251–56. An answer that comes close reads: ⲟⲩⲟⲥⲛⲁⲩ ⲡ[ⲉ ϩⲙ] ⲡⲉⲓϩⲱⲃ, "There is duplicity [in] this matter" (P.Vat. Copt. 1, no. 185; ibid., 255). A few answers insist on belief and trust: "Do not abandon the faith in your heart" (P.Vat. Copt. 1, no. 53), and "Trust in God" (P.Vat. Copt. 1, no. 56).

52 The Berlin "Bibelorakel" fragment reads under John 4:10 (column 4) in Greek and Coptic: ἐὰ[ν πι]στεύσῃς χαρά [σοι γ]ίνεται ⲉⲕⲱⲁⲛⲡⲓⲥⲧⲉⲩⲉ ⲟⲩⲛ[ⲟⲩ ⲣⲁ]ⲱⲉ ⲛⲁⲱⲱⲡⲉ ⲛⲁⲕ, "if you believe, you will have joy" (Otto Stegmüller, "Zu den Bibelorakeln im Codex Bezae," *Biblica* 34 [1953]: 13–22, here 17). This phrase has a parallel in the Latin manuscript g^1: *si credis gaudium tibi fiet* (ibid., 20).

53 In some Coptic translations of the New Testament, διψυχία and δίψυχος are rendered as ϩⲛⲧ ⲥⲛⲁⲩ (James 1:8 and 4:8b, and Matt 14:31); see W. E. Crum, *A Coptic Dictionary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1939), 714b. This suggests that a Greek *Vorlage* (of the Gospel of the Lots

does not occur in classical Greek writings, nor in the Septuagint, which has neither διστάζω ('to doubt') nor διψυχία ('doublemindedness').[54] In the Greek literature preserved from antiquity, the term διψυχία makes its first appearance in the Epistle of James.[55] James 1:5–8 reads:

> Εἰ δέ τις ὑμῶν λείπεται σοφίας, αἰτείτω παρὰ τοῦ διδόντος θεοῦ πᾶσιν ἁπλῶς καὶ μὴ ὀνειδίζοντος, καὶ δοθήσεται αὐτῷ. αἰτείτω δὲ ἐν πίστει μηδὲν διακρινόμενος· ὁ γὰρ διακρινόμενος ἔοικεν κλύδωνι θαλάσσης ἀνεμιζομένῳ καὶ ῥιπιζομένῳ. μὴ γὰρ οἰέσθω ὁ ἄνθρωπος ἐκεῖνος ὅτι λήμψεταί τι παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου, ἀνὴρ δίψυχος, ἀκατάστατος ἐν πάσαις ταῖς ὁδοῖς αὐτοῦ.
>
> If any of you is lacking in wisdom, ask God, who gives to all generously and ungrudgingly, and it will be given to him. But ask in faith, never doubting, for the one who doubts is like a wave of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind; for the doubter, being double-minded and unstable in every way, must not expect to receive anything from the Lord.[56]

The author returns to the concept again later in the letter, in 4:8, again in a context of petitioning God.[57]

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of Mary) read διψυχία. James 1:8 ⲡⲣⲱⲙⲉ ⲛ̅ⲣⲏⲧ ⲥⲛⲁⲩ (Horner, *The Coptic Version of the New Testament in the Southern Dialect, otherwise called Sahidic and Thebaic* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1924], 7:188); also James 4:8b (ibid., 7:224–25).

54 As Fredrich Hauck (*Der Brief des Jakobus*, KNT 16 [Leipzig: Werner Scholl, 1926], 49 n. 47) also notes: "δίψυχος selbst findet sich in der LXX nicht, dagegen καρδία δισσή Sir 1, 28."

55 LSJ s.v. διψυχία, δίψυχος has only three instances for this word group. The first, Hesychius lexicographus, a fifth century CE Greek dictionary roughly contemporaneous with the *sortes* texts, interprets διψυχία as ἀπορία. The other two examples are for the adjective δίψυχος, -ον, 'double-minded.' See also the previous footnote.

56 The Vulgate (Jerome) renders James 1:8 as "vir duplex animo." The Corbey MS renders it as: "Homo duplici corde" (as quoted by Joseph B. Mayor, *The Epistle of St. James: The Greek Text with Introduction* [London: Macmillan, 1892], 3). Similarly at James 4:8 Vulgate: "duplices animo"; Corbey MS: "duplices corde" (ibid., 19).

57 James 4:1–10: "Those conflicts and disputes among you, where do they come from? Do they not come from your cravings that are at war within you? You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder. And you covet something and cannot obtain it; so you engage in disputes and conflicts. You do not have, because you do not ask. You ask and do not receive, because you ask wrongly, in order to spend what you get on your pleasures. Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God. Or do you suppose that it is for nothing that the scripture says, 'God yearns jealously for the spirit that he has made to dwell in us'? But he gives all the more grace; therefore it says, 'God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.' Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you. Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you.

In his commentary on James 1:8, Dale Allison notes that although the term δίψυχος does not appear in the Septuagint, it is clearly the opposite of the concept of a 'single heart' and a 'whole heart' in the Hebrew Bible.[58] Allison refers to the fact that in the Septuagint the expression "with a whole heart" (ἐξ ὅλης τῆς καρδίας) and "with a whole soul" (ἐξ ὅλης τῆς ψυχῆς) are parallel in Deut 6:5. He concludes, "and if a 'whole heart and a 'whole soul' are synonymous or nearly so, it would seem to follow that a double heart … would entail a double soul (δίψυχος)."[59] According to Allison, the link with prayer was conventional in Jewish and early Christian texts:[60]

Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded (δίψυχοι). Lament and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy into dejection. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you."

58 Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of James*, 187. According to Oscar Seitz, the Greek term δίψυχος renders the Hebrew phrase בלב ולב. Seitz refers to the Thanksgiving Scroll (Hodayot) from Qumran: "they inquire of thee with a double heart" ("Afterthoughts on the Term 'Dipsychos,'" *NTS* 4 [1958]: 327–34, here 328). For the Hebrew, see the edition by Carol A. Newsom, Eileen M. Schuller, and Hartmut Stegemann, *1QHodayot a: with Incorporation of 1QHodayot b and 4QHodayot a-f*, DJD 40 (Oxford: Clarendon, 2009), 157, line 15; translated as "with a divided heart" (ibid., 165, line 15). As Seitz remarks, both the Thanksgiving Scroll and Hermas allude to Ezek 13. In Hermas, there is even an explicit connection with divination, as Seitz notes: "These double-minded men, therefore, come to him, as if he were a soothsayer, and enquire of him what is to happen to them" (the Greek word is μάντις) ("Afterthoughts on the Term 'Dipsychos,'" 329). Seitz (ibid., 331) concludes: "we have here additional evidence to support the view that some Greek translator of a Hebrew document coined this adjective … to represent the concept of the double or divided heart…. such coinage was probably not the work of the author of the Epistle of James, since the adjective, substantive and verb were known to at least two second-century Greek writers from their use of an apocryphon which they quoted as 'scripture.' There is every reason to believe that James and Hermas derived their terminology from the same source." He speculates that this may have been either the Secrets of Elijah, or, what he prefers, Eldad and Modad (ibid., 332–33). Dale Allison in his commentary on this passage also posits that James borrowed the idiom from the lost apocryphon of Eldad and Modad (*A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of James*, ICC [New York: Bloomsbury, 2013], 188). See also Seitz, "Relationship of the Shepherd of Hermas to the Epistle of James," *JBL* 63 (1944): 131–40; Seitz, "Antecedents and Signification of the Term ΔΙΨΥΧΟΣ," *JBL* 66 (1947): 211–19. Also Hauck (*Der Brief des Jakobus*, 49–50 n. 47) argued that the word διψυχία is pre-Christian: "Da 1 Clem 23, 2 (2 Clem 11, 2–4) es in einem Zitat bringt, ist das Wort wahrscheinlich schon vor-christliche Prägung, vgl. Hen. 91,4."

59 Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of James*, 187.

60 Ibid., 188. "The use of שתי לבבו/לב ולב or δίψυχος in connection with prayer, found in James, Tanḥuma, and probably Ecclesiasticus, as well as in Herm. *Mand.* 9, Apost. Const. 7.11 … and Apoc. Elijah 1.26, must have been traditional; and one recalls the important of an undivided heart for prayer in rabbinic literature. An association with doubt was also likely traditional, for this appears not only in James but also in 1 Clem. 11.2."

> Prayer is to be whole-hearted, not half-minded.... God, in biblical texts, seeks the 'whole/entire heart' or 'singleness of heart' (Col. 3.22) or 'purity of heart.' This is indeed the fundamental demand of the Shema': "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might."[61]

Subsequent Christian authors adopt the word 'doublemindedness' in their vocabulary. In fact, the writings of the Roman-Christian author Hermas, from the second century CE, are the prism through which this term gets dispersed.[62] Carolyn Osiek reckons that "διψυχία ('double-soulness' or 'doublemindedness') and its related verb and adjective occur 55 times in *Hermas* ... as contrasted to a total of 10 times in all other early Christian literature up to this time."[63] The concept of doublemindedness greatly troubled Hermas. He considers it "the daughter of the devil."[64] Besides liberally employing the word throughout his

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61 Ibid., 189.

62 That is how we should also explain Origen's frequent use of the term. Origen (like Clement) knew Hermas well, as is apparent from his many citations of the work. As Anneweis van den Hoek ("Clement and Origen as Sources on 'Noncanonical' Scriptural Traditions," in *Origeniana Sexta. Origène et La Bible / Origen and the Bible. Actes du Colloquium Origenianum Sextum. Chantilly, 30 août–3 septembre 1993*, ed. Gilles Dorival and Alain Le Boulluec, BETL 118 [Leuven: Peeters, 1995], 93–113, here 98–99) observes: "The *Shepherd* of Hermas was well regarded by both our Alexandrian writers. The very first surviving line of Clement's *Stromateis* is, in fact, a quotation from Hermas.... Hermas is cited even more often by Origen than by Clement. Origen, moreover, frequently acknowledges this debt explicitly." See also ibid., 102. Pierre Nautin (*Origène, Homélies sur Jérémie*, SC 238 [Paris: Cerf, 1976], 83 n. 2) notes: "On se rappellera la place que la διψυχία tient dans le *Pasteur* d'Hermas, ouvrage qu'Origène cite plusieurs fois." Husson and Nautin translate δίψυχοι with 'les hésitants' (ibid., 83). Among the apostolic fathers one finds the term in 1 and 2 Clem. and especially Hermas (see also Hauck, *Der Brief des Jakobus*, 49 n. 47). As sin: Origen, *Hom. Exod.* 8.4. The Didache (4:7) combines doubt with giving: "do not doubt to give."

63 Carolyn Osiek, *Shepherd of Hermas: A Commentary*, Hermeneia 83 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1999), 30: "Διψυχία ('double-soulness' or 'doublemindedness') and its related verb and adjective occur 55 times in *Hermas*: διψυχία ('doublemindedness') 16 times, διψυχεῖν ('to be double-minded') 20 times, and δίψυχος ('double-minded') 19 times – as contrasted to a total of 10 times in all other early Christian literature up to this time." See also Osiek's special discussion of the term in §3.3.2 (ibid., 30–31). See also Seitz, "Afterthoughts on the Term ΔΙΨΥΧΟΣ"; Seitz, "Relationship of the Shepherd of Hermas to the Epistle of James"; Seitz, "Antecedents and Signification of the Term ΔΙΨΥΧΟΣ." See Matt 6:24, Luke 8:14, Did. 5:1. See also διψυχία καὶ ἀπιστία in 2 Clem. 19:2.

64 "'For any man who is of two minds and does not repent will be saved only with difficulty. And so cleanse your heart from doublemindedness and clothe yourself with faith, because it is strong, and trust God that you will receive all the requests you have made. And if you ever ask for something from the Lord, but receive it only after a long delay, do not

text, he devoted an entire section to doubt and doublemindedness.[65] Hermas's ninth *mandatum* reads almost like a manual for a divinatory book, and it is therefore worth quoting at length:

> He [the Shepherd] said to me: "Get rid of your doublemindedness (διψυχία), and do not be at all of two minds about whether to ask for something from God, saying to yourself, 'How can I ask anything from the Lord and receive it, after committing so many sins against him?' Do not debate these matters back and forth, but turn to the Lord with all your heart, and ask him without doubting (ἀδιστάκτως), and you will know his great compassion; for he will never forsake you but will fulfill the request of your soul (τὸ αἴτημα τῆς ψυχῆς σου)…." Ask (αἰτοῦ) from the Lord, and you will receive everything. You will lack nothing you have requested, if you ask the Lord without doubting (ἐὰν ἀδιστάκτως αἰτήσῃ παρὰ τοῦ κυρίου). But if you doubt in your heart, you will never receive anything you have requested (ἐὰν δὲ διστάσῃς ἐν τῇ καρδίᾳ σου, οὐδὲν οὐ μὴ λήψῃ τῶν αἰτημάτων σου). Those who doubt God are of two minds, and they obtain none of their requests. But those who are mature in faith ask all things, confident in the Lord; and they receive them because they have asked without doubting, never being of two minds.[66]

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begin to doubt, simply because you did not receive your innermost request quickly. For you probably received your request slowly because of some temptation or transgression that you did not know about. And so, do not stop making your innermost request, for you will receive it. But if you become disheartened and double-minded while making your request, blame yourself and not the one who gives to you. Be on the alert against this doublemindedness; for it is evil and senseless, and it uproots many from faith, even those who are very faithful and strong. For this doublemindedness is the daughter of the devil, and it works great evil against the slaves of God. And so, despise doublemindedness and rule over it in your every deed, clothing yourself with the strong and powerful faith. For faith promises all things and perfects all things, but the doublemindedness that lacks confidence in itself fails in everything that it does. And so you see,' he said, 'that faith comes from above, from the Lord, and is very powerful. But doublemindedness is an earthly spirit from the devil and is powerless. You, therefore, abstain from the doublemindedness that has none, and you will live to God. And everyone who thinks these things will live to God'" (Herm. Mand. 39.9.7–10 [trans. Ehrman, LCL 25], 275, 277). On the 'daughter of evil,' see also Allison, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle of James*, 189–90.

65 Hauck, *Der Brief des Jakobus*. According to Hauck, this is Hermas's favorite word ("Lieblingswort," ibid., 49 n. 47).

66 Herm. Mand. 39.9.1–6 (trans. Ehrman, LCL 25). Edition: Robert Joly, *Hermas. Le pasteur*, SC 53 (Paris: Cerf, 1958), 182–83.

Hermas thus seems obsessed with doublemindedness. The editor of the Sources chrétiennes volume on Hermas, Robert Joly, comments on this passage: "This is not a matter of dogmatic, doctrinal doubt, but a lack of confidence in the success of prayer … and generally, a lack of firmness in the life of faith."[67] For Hermas, just as for James and Matthew, as we will see below, doubt and being of two minds inhibit receiving what one asks for in prayer.

Hermas enjoyed great popularity in Egypt, evidenced both in frequent citations by church writers and an abundance of ancient manuscripts.[68] Such widespread use of Hermas in Egypt makes it plausible that the author of the Gospel of the Lots of Mary also knew the book[69] and derived from it the insistence on steadfastness of asking in prayer and abhorrence of doublemindedness and doubting. I should note here that doublemindedness (διψυχία) remains a literary term unattested in documentary papyri. This suggests that it was not used colloquially, or at least not a word one would be likely to use in writings such as private letters or contracts. We may thus also take this as an indication of the composers' familiarity with Christian literature (and not only liturgy).

I argue that by not describing the text as ἀψευδής ('unerring, truthful'), but instead by employing this language of doublemindedness and doubt in the divinatory text, the author of the Gospel of the Lots of Mary makes a brilliant move, namely, bringing the *sortes* text into the realm of prayer. With this vocabulary of doubt and doublemindedness, the author has constructed sortilege as a counterpart of prayer, placing it in the theology of steadfastness in prayer: "ask and you will receive."[70] The corollary of faith is its negative counterpart: if you doubt, you will not receive (James 1:5–8).

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67 "Ici non plus il ne s'agit pas du doute dogmatique, doctrinal mais du manque de confiance dans le succès de la prière (cette διψυχία s'oppose à la πίστις-confiance définie plus haut) et en général du manque de fermeté dans la vie de foi" (ibid., 183 n. 1).

68 For the numerous Hermas manuscripts, see Malcolm Choat and Rachel Yuen-Collingridge, "The Egyptian Hermas: The Shepherd in Egypt before Constantine," in *Early Christian Manuscripts: Examples of Applied Method and Approach*, ed. Thomas J. Kraus and Tobias Nicklas, TENTS 5 (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 191–212.

69 A review of this word in Greek literature (i.e., a TLG search) shows that it was especially popular among Egyptian church writers in the fourth and fifth centuries, probably under the influence of the Shepherd of Hermas. The word gained popularity in Egypt, where Origen, Athanasius and Cyril of Alexandria applied it in their writings, but also Ephrem the Syrian et al. It is also used as a synonym for ἀπιστία (unbelief) (e.g., John 20, on Thomas).

70 Matt 7:7–11: "'Ask, and it will be given to you; search, and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened for you (Αἰτεῖτε καὶ δοθήσεται ὑμῖν, ζητεῖτε καὶ εὑρήσετε, κρούετε καὶ ἀνοιγήσεται ὑμῖν). For everyone who asks receives, and everyone who searches finds, and for everyone who knocks, the door will be opened. Is there anyone among you who, if your child asks for bread, will give a stone? Or if the child asks for a fish, will give a snake?

The connection between sortilege and prayer is further strengthened by the use of the word ⲁⲓⲧⲏⲙⲁ (αἴτημα), 'request,' to refer to the divinatory questions in this text. This is indeed the same vocabulary used in the early Christian sections on steadfastness of prayer.[71] Prayer and sortilege are closely connected in practice.[72] In a lengthy article on "Religious Mentality in Ancient Prayer," Henk Versnel argues that oracles are forms of prayer or imply prayer and that oracular requests and supplicatory prayer are closely related.[73] As Versnel asks: "Does the anxious question of 'whether my son will recover from consumption'... not imply the unspoken prayer that the reply be favourable?"[74]

Although the Gospel of the Lots of Mary does not explicitly say so, when ancient authors describe divinatory sessions, or when we have instructions on the use of divinatory manuscripts, they mention that these began with prayer. We find this, for instance, in biblical passages, in the preface to the Sortes Astrampsychi, the Sortes of Pithou and other Jewish and Christian lot books with instructions for practicing sortilege.[75] By bringing sortilege into the realm

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If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good things to those who ask him!" See also Mark 5:36, 9:23, 11:23; Matt 8:10, 9:22, 21:21; Luke 8:50, and the parables on perseverance in prayer, Luke 11:5–13, 18:1–8. Steadfastness in prayer stands in a strong Jewish tradition that Christian writers adopted. For instance, Sir. 7:10: μὴ ὀλιγοψυχήσῃς ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ σου, "Do not grow weary when you pray," and Philo, *Deus* 156: ἐπήκοοι δὲ αἱ τοῦ θεοφιλοῦς εὐχαί, "the prayers of him whom God loves are always heard" (trans. Colson and Whitaker, *Philo, On the Unchangeableness of God*, 88–89). Hermas contains many links to divination, even explicitly mentioning the Cumaean Sibyl in Vision 8.1 (2.4.1). D. P. O'Brien ("The Cumaean Sibyl as the Revelation-Bearer in the Shepherd of Hermas," *JECS* 5 [1997]: 473–96, here 473–74) observes that "[i]t is generally conceded that even though the appellation 'Sibyl' is used only once, there are several allusions to the Cumaean Sibyl in the preceding passages." He (ibid., 474 n. 3) mentions "the explicit references to Cumae ... the old age of the woman ... the fact that the old woman bears a message from God in writing ... which needed the services of an interpreter (augur?) ... and other possible allusions to Aeneas' encounter with the Cumaean Sibyl as depicted in Virgil's Aeneid, chapter 6."

71 The vocabulary is that of asking (αἰτέω, αἴτημα), not praying (εὔχομαι et al.); so too in James, Matthew (in the plural, αἰτεῖτε), and Hermas (in the singular).

72 Somewhat related, Arietta Papaconstantinou (*Le culte des saints en Égypte: des Byzantins aux Abbassides: L'apport des inscriptions et des papyrus grecs et coptes* [Paris: CNRS Editions, 2001], 341) discusses how phylacteries and prayer are also closely connected.

73 Hendrik S. Versnel, "Religious Mentality in Ancient Prayer," in *Faith, Hope and Worship: Aspects of Religious Mentality in the Ancient World*, ed. Hendrik S. Versnel (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 1–64, here 7: "the oracle question and the prayer of supplication are close to each other.... Here we see clearly how asking for knowledge and asking for help are frequently two sides of the same thing."

74 Ibid., 8.

75 About the connection between prayer and lot book, Burkhardt notes: "Bereits in der Bibel wird das Losen als religiöse Handlung, als 'Losen vor dem Herrn' dargestellt. Es offenbart

of prayer, the author of this Christian text has crafted the session of opening the book and consulting the text as a continuation of the preceding ritual.

Thus by paralleling divination with prayer, the authors of these and other Christian *sortes* have rendered the text theologically effective and have successfully positioned themselves in the debate about oracles against elite Christian leaders who frown upon the practice.[76] These findings are also significant for the broader view on the Christianization of lot texts. I noted that Jesus plays a minor role and that these oracles do not appear to emit a traditional Christian worldview sustained by cross and resurrection. Perhaps ironically, the most distinct Christian fingerprint in these and other Christian *sortes* is that of the discourse of doubt.

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dem Menschen den göttlichen Willen und bietet somit die Mögligkeit einer Kommunikation mit Gott, wenn sich der Mensch mit seiner Frage im Gebet an ihn wendet" ("Hebräische Losbuchhandschriften," 137). She then refers to instances in the Bible and other lot texts and oracles site procedures where clients pray before they consult the oracle or lot.

76 For a discussion and further bibliography, see Luijendijk, *Forbidden Oracles?* 79–92.

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